



# The Boys in Schools

**BULLETIN** → Practical Initiatives Addressing Boys' Needs

PRODUCED BY BOYS IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM OF THE FAMILY ACTION CENTRE

## In this issue

### Games Teachers Play

A simulation game that captures boys' imaginations

### Boys 'n' Books

A peer mentor program that really works

### Morphing Literacy

Boys reading outside the curriculum

### Also

Reading champions

Language, communication, power and boys

The Brain Module

Learning styles research

Black and white looking after their own



*Engaging boys*

### *The Boys in Schools Bulletin*

- Focuses on practical initiatives going on in schools
- Puts teachers in touch with others who are trialling new approaches to boys' education
- Supports and encourages a constructive debate on boys' education issues
- Develops materials and programs to assist teachers in their work with boys
- Provides information on new resources directed at boys



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## Editorial



What are boys doing with literacy these days? The feature on Blair and Sanford's Canadian literacy research in this edition of the *Bulletin* show us that boys are using literacy to enhance their social relationships.

As we know from our own research, they're downloading cheats so they can play games with their mates, they're looking up the footy scores with their dads, and snuggling up with their mums to read a good book.

In John Marsden's story, he highlights the joys and the importance of boys finding and not losing their own voice in speaking and writing. Yet the evidence seems to point to a mismatch between the rich, purposeful, multi-literate lives of boys outside of school and their disengagement with learning in school.

We ask ourselves, 'What makes a difference for boys?' And increasingly the answers seem to lie with teachers. In particular, two aspects of teaching: good pedagogy and good relationships seem to hold the key to success for boys in school. So in the other features in this edition, we've gathered some great stories and tools for doing just that.

It was hard to categorise these into primary and secondary sections as many of the tools, techniques and programs apply equally to primary or secondary. You may just have to read every article this time.

Sharing an interest with boys is a great way to start a good relationship. In 'Black and White Looking After Their Own', this happens through rugby league, and in 'Reading Champions' and 'Boys 'n' Books' it happens through reading.

Having fun with boys in the classroom is good for teachers and boys. It helps a lot if everyone knows how they like to learn. Diane McRoberts' 'Brain Module' helps boys entering high school to find out about their own learning styles and let their teachers know their learning profile. Tony Butz and the teachers in the postgraduate program in educating boys also take up this theme. The teachers at Macquarie Fields are doing their own action research into how boys like to learn, and Merrick Brewer's simulation game has boys begging for more.

With some new resources, a new staff member, and a lot of teachers out there engaging boys, there's a lot to celebrate in this last edition for 2003. Thanks to all our contributors and readers.

**Deborah Hartman**

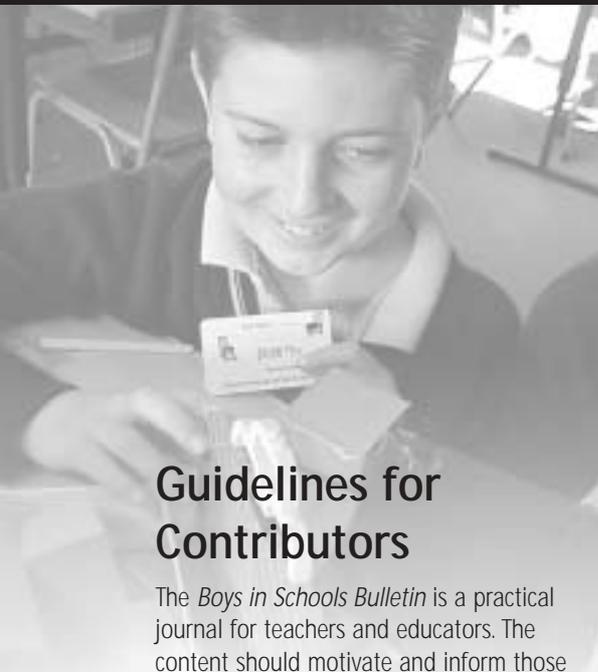
For the editorial committee

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**Disclaimer**

Other than the Editorial, the ideas and opinions presented in the *Boys in Schools Bulletin* are those of the contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the ideas and opinions of the Boys in Schools Program or the Family Action Centre.

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## Guidelines for Contributors

The *Boys in Schools Bulletin* is a practical journal for teachers and educators. The content should motivate and inform those who work with boys and young men to try new approaches which benefit the boys, the school and the whole community (including, of course, the girls).

The sorts of questions we use when asking about initiatives are:

- Say a bit about your school: What was the initiative and who was it aimed at?
- What happened?
- What lessons did you learn?
- What advice would you give to other teachers as a result?

This doesn't have to be a formula but the information must be about what is happening with boys in schools. If you are in any doubt, have a look at previous issues of the *Bulletin*. Or contact us and talk about it.

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# The Much Awaited Man

**Last issue we ran an article on our first graduate. Little did we know that he was also to become our first Assistant Manager.**



Stephen lives in Newcastle with his wife and their four boys. Stephen can be contacted on (02) 4921 6416 or email <Stephen.Gaul@newcastle.edu.au>

PHOTO: EDWARD CROSS

Over the past twelve months, the Boys In Schools team has been struggling to keep up with the increased demand from schools for action learning, seminars and workshops. We simply didn't have enough people on the ground with experience in boys' education. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough money to do anything about that — until now that is.

It would be an understatement to say we are very happy to welcome Stephen Gaul to our team. We look forward to his input and to being able to provide expanded services to teachers across the country.

Stephen joined the team in August bringing with him a broad base of experiences in the field of boys' education, a strong organisational background and a passion for helping boys develop into fine young men.

For the last 19 years Stephen has been teaching boys in comprehensive high schools within NSW. During that period he has held the positions of classroom teacher, year adviser, advanced skills teacher in charge of literacy, head teacher PDHPE and relieving deputy principal.

As a PD/H/PE teacher Stephen has dealt with a number of the issues concerning boys and their personal development. Over the years this led him to become increasingly concerned about where our boys were heading in their lives, specifically in the academic and social areas.

Stephen was already involved in working to enhance boys' outcomes through abseiling and outdoor camps, coaching rugby teams and rowing crews and developing programs aimed at teaching social skills and increasing self-esteem. With his interest in boys' education aroused, Stephen enrolled in our initial Graduate Certificate in Educating Boys and became the course's first graduate. The next year Stephen completed his Master of Educational Studies specialising in behaviour problems and boys' education.

Stephen also completed the Rock and Water three-day training program in 2000 and since then has taught the program to Years 7, 8 and 9 in his own school, and to Year 6 students at his high school's main feeder primary school. Using some Rock and Water activities in conjunction with other resources he has written and developed a program to build the anger management skills of boys.

As a qualified abseiling and rock-climbing instructor, Stephen uses knots and ropes as a method of engaging the boys' interest and teaching them problem-solving skills through a number of physical learning experiences.

We're very happy to have Stephen on board. His skills and experience will be invaluable and his cheerful, positive approach to life most welcome.



# Primary Section

## Language, Communication, Power and Boys

Language is the most powerful tool humans have.

Boys who are disadvantaged in language are disadvantaged in many crucial ways. For example, it will be much more difficult for them to obtain jobs, and difficult for them to get promoted in those jobs. Relationships run into problems when one or both partners are unable to talk about the issues.

For a boy to develop his own voice is to aid his sense of identity. The person who can express his opinion, communicate his feelings, argue his case, and convey a sense of himself to others, is likely to grow in confidence and self-understanding.

Language is closely related to thinking. By developing language skills in boys, we facilitate their intellectual development, so that they are better able to understand abstract and complex topics.

The loss of voice is a process that begins very early, and causes great damage. In Jane Gardam's memorable phrase, 'Every child is a poet until [he] is eight years old'. Children begin their language journey in a creative and adventurous way, but very quickly learn to conform to a dreary monotony. Reversing this process, and giving boys back their voices, is essential if we are to truly empower them.

The process by which we 'lose our voices' is an invidious and usually permanent one. It begins in early childhood. Young children have an instinctive love of language, take delight in it, and are happy to play with it and experiment with it. Among adults, only poets seem to have retained this ability. We have to ask ourselves, by what process are children turned from bright-eyed lovers of language into dull-eyed language robots in the space of just a few years?

One of the defining moments for me, as a person and as a language/user, was the day I took a workshop in a Tasmanian high school. Noticing that the students were getting bored after a few hours in the classroom, I suggested that they pick up their pens and paper and head out across the playing field to the edge of the school property. Once there, we spread ourselves along the cliffs that overlook Bass Strait, and I asked them to describe the view.

The girl next to me picked up her pen and started writing with such confidence and fluency that I thought she must be a really good writer. I snuck a look at her first few words, and was disappointed to see 'The sparkling blue ocean . . .'

I was something more than disappointed though when I looked at the

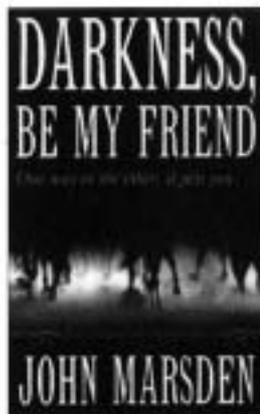
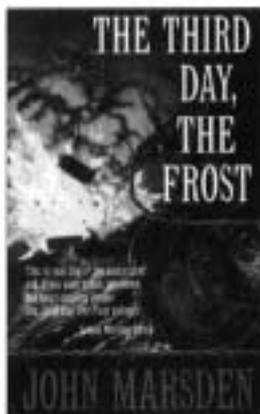
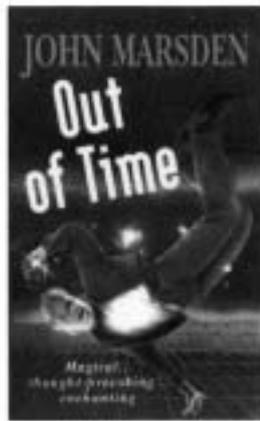
**John Marsden's inspiring presentation at our recent conference stimulated the *Bulletin* to think about the power of language and the importance of retaining our own unique voices. Here are the highlights of John Marsden's presentation for those unfortunates that missed out.**



*'Every child is a poet until [he] is eight years old.'*

ocean itself. In front of us was a mess of water. A storm was brewing, and the ocean was working itself up into a frenzy. It was dark, choppy, wild, agitated.

On the way home I kept thinking about the girl, and wondering how it was that she had lost her voice to such an extent that she was no longer able to see what was in front of her, but instead relied upon the secondhand (millionth-hand!)



language that had been programmed into her for so many years. Her reliance upon this language had made her blind to the world around her.

This loss of voice begins in our earliest years, and can have disastrous consequences, as I believe it did for the girl in Tasmania. One of the most powerful ways adults bring about this change is by laughing at children when they use language creatively.

For example, my neighbour's little daughter often runs around with bare feet. Sometimes she treads on a thistle, and gets a sore foot. The other day she trod on a bee, and the bee stung her on the sole. She hopped into the house crying. When her mother asked 'What's wrong?', she replied, 'I trod on a flyaway thistle.'

The natural reaction of adults is to laugh when a child talks like this. We take some delight in laughing at the child who uses language in a way, which is unconventional or experimental. Such laughter is believed by adults to be kind and friendly, but is perceived by children to be contemptuous. In fact it usually does have a patronising edge.

Children, who so desperately want to be big and powerful, quickly realise that they are using language in a way, which is different to that of adults. They listen carefully, and imitate adults, until they have acquired the adult voice, which they think is one of the keys to power, but sadly, along the way, they often lose their own voice, and all that goes with it, including a sense of identity, and an ability to see the world in a unique and honest way.

By respecting children's inventive play with language, by encouraging it, and by modelling examples of it (for instance, by reading them books where authors have shown a willingness to extend the language), we make it more likely that they will grow up to be confident and fluent users of English.

If this does not happen, the child who is laughed at quickly takes a different path, the path of safety. The child or adult who does not want to be laughed at learns to speak in a manner, which will not attract that unwelcome attention, and to write in the same vein. Hence we have speakers who begin speeches with standard phrases like 'On behalf of the Year 10 students at Pittwater High School I would like to thank you for your participation in our festival this evening . . .'

Similarly, such users of English write letters like this: 'I am writing to apply for a position advertised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 4 May. I am a Year 12 student at Barker College. My interests are music, surfing and cars . . . ' Attempts by such people to write fiction will be equally banal.

There is every reason to suppose that boys are particularly hesitant and tentative in their use of language, and that they are particularly vulnerable to 'losing their voices'. Our voices are inextricably linked to our identities. If someone wants to take over and dominate another person, the first thing they do is to try to control their voice. We see this on a macro level, in countries like Sweden (where Lapps were sent to boarding schools and caned if they spoke Lapp), Alsace-Lorraine (where the use of French in schools was banned by the German invaders), and in Australia (where Aboriginal children were caned in schools or on mission stations when they used their own language).

Language locates us within a group. The person who has not learnt the language of the community is made to feel like an outsider. Students who move from school to school understand this very well indeed.

Voice reflects our age, our place of residence, our personalities, our gender, and our status. Of particular importance is the way language affects status. Even in a supposed democracy like Australia, status differences are established and perpetuated through language. For example, many Australians believe that the word 'youse' is a low-status word. There are still jobs that will be barred to young people who use this word.

Characteristics of high-status speakers include speaking slowly (high-status speakers assume no-one will dare interrupt them), fluency of language, an ability to use long words, sarcasm, aggression, loud volume. Of course these criteria do not apply to all speakers all of the time, but an understanding of how status affects language, and how that helps to determine the outcome of situations, is extremely helpful, indeed powerful, to all school students, boys and girls — and to adults.

Characteristics of low-status speakers include low volume, hesitancy, use of entreaties, and over-apologising. Bill Bryson writes of Australians' 'charming' habit of apologising for things that aren't their fault.

Body language is another powerful way in which messages about status are conveyed. In schools, students are reminded of their low status virtually every minute of every day. Although this happens in a subtle and unconscious way most of the time, it helps to account for students' feelings of helplessness and rage.

If we truly want to empower students, as we so often say that we do, we will give them back their voices, and teach them about status.

*There is every reason to suppose that boys are particularly hesitant and tentative in their use of language, and that they are particularly vulnerable to 'losing their voices'.*

In a fourteen-year writing career John Marsden has sold three million books worldwide. He has written twenty novels, and nine other books, as well as editing three anthologies. The novels include *So Much to Tell You*, *Letters from the Inside* and *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, which has had to be reprinted thirty times since its release in 1994 to meet the extraordinary demand for it.

John has won every major writing award in Australia for young people's fiction. Internationally, he has twice been named among Best Books of the Year by the American Library Association and once by *Publishers' Weekly* (USA), has been runner-up for Dutch Children's Book of the Year, shortlisted for the German Young Readers Award, and won the Grand Jury Prize as Austria's Most Popular Writer for Teenagers, and won the coveted Buxtehuder Bulle in Germany.

# Games Teachers Play

**Merrick Brewer explains how he gives students a taste of the real world in his highly inventive simulation *The Game*.**

Located in Victoria, one hour's drive east of Melbourne, Chairo Christian School has four campuses: a junior school (Year Prep to Year 4), middle school (Years 5 to 8), senior school (Years 9 to 12) and Cardinia Campus (Kinder to Year 7).

The middle school campus is on the same site as the senior school but operates as a separate school. Most classes are double streamed and have a core or homeroom teacher. There are around 230 students at middle school with students coming from a broad cross-section of the community. The middle school has been operating for five years and has been established to engage students and enable them to grow and develop as autonomous learners.

Most of us play games and enjoy the thrill of winning. There's something about playing a game that brings out the competitive streak and very few people play to lose. Certainly this is the case with boys.

Boys don't want to appear as failures in front of their peers. They want to 'save face', and walk away bragging to their mates about their conquests. When boys play games they often lay aside all their inhibitions and insecurities. Something comes over them and they take on a new persona as the competitive giant awakens within. The quiet, placid boy ends up having to fight for survival. The loud, overbearing bully may not win and may have to learn to cop defeat on the chin.

Anticipation has been building for the beginning of *The Game*. As we get further into the school term, the excitement is agonising. Grade 6 has known from the beginning of the year that it will be their turn to play. Yes, our reputation precedes us.

Over the school year my class becomes a simulation game. The students are absorbed into the 'real' world where they must live by the agreed rules and regulations, earning money, buying a home and running a business. They have to rely on their own wits to succeed and their rewards will be dependent on how they play *The Game*. Over time they will build a town of their own making. As soon as the children walk in the door, they enter a new world limited only by their imaginations.

*The Game* involves individual pursuit, initiative and commitment along with team-working elements such as communication, cooperation, relationships, conflict resolution and sharing. It is a game of strategy and persistence. The outcome is never the same.

In a stimulating environment, they are developing language skills as they communicate to survive. They learn to negotiate, trade, cooperate and, at times, admit defeat. The willingness to do this is continually phenomenal to me as I watch my boys evolve from verbally challenged to verbally prolific. The boys come into their own as they gradually allow themselves the pleasure of interaction. Rarely have I experienced a child not willing to participate. They may want to give up but this is a perfect opportunity to develop relational and verbal communication.

## Setting up *The Game*

To initiate *The Game* a theme is determined and especially printed 'class currency' is designed accordingly. Currencies I've used include different words from the environment, varying sizes of gold, different countries and, of course, just a range of personally designed banknotes. Any of these can be made on a publishing program on a computer.

It takes five to six weeks to set up the ground rules, set up the currency and explain how rewards are earned. Initially, I don't tell the children that they are playing a game. I don't tell them what they are working towards or what is going to happen with their 'money' in the end. I reward them for any reason I can find, ensuring that I am encouraging positive behaviour. I hold question and answer times in class where I reward for different responses and for creative additions.

Once most students have earned some money (\$400–\$500), everything in the classroom is put up for sale. I set up the items to be run as a business. Any business is acceptable. In a brainstorming session students develop business ideas and ways that these businesses could be run. I pay them for valid and useful ideas then put up all the businesses for auction. The only limit is that students are not allowed to 'buy' school property or change the timetable. I usually try to ensure that, where possible, these businesses are confined to our classroom.

Groups may form at this stage as students work out that by combining their resources they are able to outbid the opposition. As you can imagine, some businesses are more popular than others and some businesses have more earning potential than others. I usually give some guide as to the earning potential of each business and how much it is worth. I work on the 50% rule. If it could earn \$500 throughout the running of the game, expect to pay around \$250. Obviously, as with any business, profitability is determined by how well it is run and managed by the owners.

At any stage, owners may choose to put their business up for auction. They give a little sales spiel before the auction to convince others of its worth. Auctions are run as professionally as possible. I don't allow talking during an auction; otherwise I consider it a bid. I do allow discussion time if the group needs to confer.

Before the initial auctions, I allow time for people to organise finances and determine how much they are prepared to pay. You are able to get a loan before these auctions to a maximum amount of \$1000–\$2000. In order to qualify for a loan, you have to have at least \$500 personally or as a group. Auctions must be settled immediately after the item is sold and the auctioneer receives 10% commission.

Some of the possible businesses that I have in place are:

- Police:** ensure all class rules are followed and fines for breaches.
- Bank:** moneychangers, issue loans, charge interest, maintain records, etc.
- Real estate agent/auctioneer:** records owners of all businesses, holds auctions,

receives commission for sales of businesses.

**Tables:** issues fines when things are left on the tables after people leave the room.

**Floor:** issues fines when people drop rubbish on the floor.

**Lost property:** personal items that are left around the room have to be purchased back.

**Tubs/desks:** fines for messy desk/rewards for neatness.

**Chairs:** fines for leaving your chair out/swinging on your chair.

**Newspaper:** used for advertising, explaining businesses, class stories.

**Uniform:** monitors correct uniforms and randomly rewards.

**Advertising space:** set aside a wall for advertising businesses, charge for putting up posters/notices.

**Post office:** issues stamps and delivers mail.

Some of the services, which have a standard pay rate per week are:

- empty bins
- clean the blackboard
- clean bench tops
- tidy bookshelves
- clean windows
- deliver notices
- run errands
- hand out worksheets/workbooks
- welcome visitors
- collect library books



*I watch my boys evolve from verbally challenged to verbally prolific.*

*I reward them for any reason I can find, ensuring that I am encouraging positive behaviour.*



*Anything you are asking the children to be responsible for, any rules you need to enforce — these can all be taken over by the students.*

*This time allows for the creative play and development that really inspires boys and allows them to flourish.*



Any task/job you have in the classroom can become a business. If you are stuck for ideas, run a competition. Pay for suggestions and offer rewards for anything. You have to make sure that you are prepared to let go the responsibility of your 'pet habits' and allow the students to take over. If there is any area you are not prepared to let the students run, you don't have to give up control.

As you can see, the list is really endless. Anything you are asking the children to be responsible for, any rules you need to enforce — these can all be taken over by the students. They are the ones that run the room.

Our curriculum is based around themes that last for nine to 10 weeks. As the themes are developed, I usually try to develop as many businesses as I can that are related to the theme. Some examples of theme-based businesses ideas currently for Year 6 are:

Theme	Business ideas
Government	Council, builders, insurance, court, lawyers, electricity, telephone, water, sewerage, car yard, gardener, entertainment (video), retail clothing outlets, hospital, doctors, road authority, real estate, rail system
Gold/Australian history	Tents, pans, food, picks, shovels, hotel, bank, printing, troopers, wagons, horses, stables, vet, post office, lost property, hospital, mining, licences (theme culminates in a gold rush that requires payment to participate)
Environment	Town planners, council, road authority, land, real estate, electricity, telephone, water, sewerage, car yard, gardener, entertainment (video), retail clothing outlets, hospital
Countries	Embassy, tourism, transport, airport, rail, email, power, phone, stock market, registry office, passports, credit cards, money exchangers

## Setting up the town

As a part of each theme, I set up a 'mini town' at the back of the classroom. Sometimes I carry the same town into the next theme or we just make a new one. This mini town becomes a play area where the students are able to set up their businesses. Towns are usually theme-based where possible and are developed in the same way as a city grows.

I put together two large book trolleys that have flat tops, which measure around 3 m by 1 m. These trolleys are covered in rolls of coloured paper with the outline of a town in pencil. I mark out the roads, rivers, landmarks, residential and commercial areas. The rest is left up to the students.

As you allow chaos to reign in your classroom, your fear and trepidation will grow in equal proportion to the children's excitement as they begin to build their houses and establish their businesses. Every person has to own a block of land for his or her personal house and each business has to have a building. House blocks must be maintained neatly and business premises must meet all building requirements. The council often sets these requirements and monitors the development of the town.

Students are issued a little thumbnail digital photograph of themselves so that you can tell where they are in the town at any stage of the game. Of course if they get lost, the police issue a 'missing persons' file and a reward is offered when the person is found. There is a fee involved if I have to issue a new photograph.

During the weekly timetable, I allow time to build the town, to travel around, collect bills and outstanding fines, pay off loans or whatever the imagination allows. This time allows for the creative play and development that really inspires boys and allows them to flourish.

Last term I had the telephone company set up an elaborate telephone system around the classroom involving plastic cups, string and bells. This inspired the post office to try an airmail system that involved little carrying baskets set up around the room that delivered mail. Be warned, that if you want children to be inspired, you have to let them experiment.

## Running *The Game*

I encourage each business to be managed the best way they can. Some will need guidance as to their expectations. Some children need reminding to ensure that they are on track with what is allowed and what are their responsibilities.

Basically, if someone breaks a rule, they get a fine or if they do something well, they get a reward. Fines may be issued for talking, leaving an area untidy, swinging on chairs, etc. I always encourage groups to issue warnings before fining, particularly for talking. I set a maximum for fines and rewards so that there is some consistency over the businesses. These limits will obviously change over the year as inflation takes effect.

As situations arise, you have to make up new rules. As long as you remain consistent, you can avoid many pitfalls. One of my ground rules is that I usually fine a business if I think that it is not being run properly. I inform the owners of their expectations and the group is given a week to manage it properly. If they don't meet these expectations, I may take the business and put it up for auction.

There are various ways to collect fines. Some groups are given permission to give verbal warnings during a lesson or to quietly indicate to the person that they have received a fine. Others give out infringement notices that are left on the person's table. These are laminated slips generated on Publisher around the size of a business card. Others list the person's initials and how much they have been fined on the blackboard.

One of the rules states, 'If you argue with a fine, it is doubled.' Fines should be paid first, then a settlement negotiated. Discussions to find out why the fine was issued or how to avoid it in future occur after the fine has been paid. This helps settle a lot of arguments. Students are encouraged to negotiate in an attempt to reach a win-win situation where both parties walk away happy. Often I will intervene, hold quiet negotiations with one group in an attempt to influence some issues.

For each theme, the students develop chance cards, which have two rewards and two fines. They are just like the chance cards in Monopoly. I hand them out randomly two or three times a week. Children collect their payments from the group that owns the business. Sometimes I might make a payment, depending on the instructions on the card.

As this game develops, students are forced to interact in ways that they may never have encountered. They will end up negotiating with others in the class that they may never really talk to outside group work. It takes great courage and conviction to go and tell someone they're fined. It takes even greater courage to ask someone to pay a bill or a fine. As a facilitator, I have to be very observant of what issues are going on around the room. I have found that one person may end up being the target of the police or some people might try to settle a vendetta by issuing outrageous fines. If someone can't pay a fine, I organise a time of community service, where they get paid for performing selected tasks around the classroom or the school.

Conflict resolution occurs every day. I have tried a judiciary system during one of the government themes, but I prefer students to settle out of court. If it's really expensive to go to court, you will get fewer takers. I actively avoid developing the mentality that you only resolve disagreements through litigation. Students at this age find it very difficult to be objective over some issues, particularly if a friend is involved and may not be able to make fair judgments. Some issues can be resolved in a class parliament that is separate from the simulation game.

I allow one class period a week as trading time. During this time, the children pay/collect bills, maintain properties, build, establish businesses, advertise, make announcements, and resolve issues.

Let me quickly review some of the other learning experiences that come from this game. I may not cover them all and each time I run it, something new comes along.

*They will end up negotiating with others in the class that they may never really talk to outside group work.*



*Boys want to bring their parents in to show them what they own and where their businesses are.*

*I find that I rarely have to deal with discipline issues as these are now taken care of by the children themselves.*

### **Maths**

Money, interest, loans, credit, debit, record keeping, inflation, economy, cash flow, budgeting, taxes, currency conversion, expenses, bills, income, balance sheets, shares, graphs, nets of buildings, measurement, and scale.

### **English**

Public speaking, listening, record keeping, advertising, posters, business cards, reflections, negotiating, and business structures.

### **Computers**

Use Publisher to make posters, business cards, class lists, surveys, infringement notices, record-keeping books, bankbooks; Excel to make spreadsheet of assets, income, sales, etc; Power Point to draw a map of your blocks with hyperlinks to each block explaining what's on it and who owns it.

### **SOSE, technology, art**

Depending on the theme and what you allow as a business idea. The possibilities are endless.

### **Social and emotional**

The list is really endless but here are some important ones: Negotiating, confidence, group work, conflict resolution, encouragement, communicating ideas, body language, respecting opinions, control of emotions, compromising, cooperating, resilience, patience, persistence.

While all this is going on in the classroom, I run the normal curriculum. We do maths and language every day. My timetable is fairly similar to any other Year 6 class but I must admit, I do struggle to pull everyone away from the town. As soon as the children walk into the classroom, they want to check out the town, look for changes, straighten their houses, park their cars (Micro Machines)



move their photos around or just play for a while. I often have to remind children to leave the room at the end of the day or they will miss their bus. Boys want to bring their parents in to show them what they own and where their businesses are. They are excited about sharing what they are learning.

### **Wrapping up *The Game***

I usually have a conversion time at the end of the term into new currency. You can run this game just as effectively over one or two terms but in order to ensure that I keep a lid on inflation, I convert any money or assets held into the new currency for the term.

One of the most common questions I get is, 'How do you wind this all up?' Finishing off any simulation game properly is important, and often, I believe we don't give children as much credit as they deserve. Sometimes we over-compensate for what we think they should be feeling or what they should be learning. If they have had fun, learnt something and grown in character, this game is worthwhile. My suggestion is don't get hung up about whether you have finished off the game properly. Learn from your mistakes. If all else fails, try asking the students what they think would be a good way to finish.

I have included a couple of ways that I have finished off the game but these are not the only ways. I usually close the town at the end of each term, ready for whatever is set up in the following term. I appoint a value for all assets, including businesses, and convert them all to cash. One of the simplest ways is to tally each group's assets register, which lists their value. Each group counts their money and I write up this list on the blackboard. Each group is then able to see how much they have compared to everyone else. Some groups may be in debt but this doesn't happen often.

Many issues can be discussed here. Are you surprised at the results? How well do you feel you performed compared to everyone else? Have you played this game to the best of your abilities? How is it that some groups have so much money? What could you have done if you were to do this again? If this is done on the last day, you can inform the students that they have learnt a lot during the game, tell them that it is over and that all their money is worthless! Yes, I know this sounds callous but I have done it in the past. Other possibilities are to have a whole class

activity that everyone has to pay to enter, e.g. a class party, or hold a class auction where students get to bid on items of interest that you have collected throughout the year.

One of the ways that I regularly finish *The Game* is to have every group divide up all their money between all their members. I write up every student's name on the board with their final cash amount. You may have some people who are in debt. I then get everyone in the class to review the list and ask if there is anyone in the class that they would like to give some money to. Once someone takes the lead, you will find that it soon snowballs, everyone may end up giving money to someone else. Remembering that students don't yet know what is going to happen to the money, this is a great teaching moment.

Try *The Game* for a term to see how it is accepted. Most importantly, allow the students to have input



into the rules, the way it is run and what they think would be worthwhile businesses. I find that I rarely have to deal with discipline issues as these are now taken care of by the children themselves. They determine what is acceptable in the classroom.

### *Comments from students:*

- *I like having the responsibility of approving houses to make sure they were good enough.*
- *I really enjoyed owning land and earning money.*
- *People made it hard when they don't pay their fines.*
- *I struggled with people arguing over their fines, I'm not the kind of guy who likes arguing.*
- *I found it hard to fine my friends.*
- *I think we all worked really well together.*
- *It was just like the real world, there was lots of competition.*
- *I was surprised at how serious people were, even though it was just a game.*
- *It was a really good experience to find out how businesses should be run.*
- *If I was to do this again, I would buy more businesses.*

The middle school teacher of Year 6 at Chairo Christian School, Merrick Brewer, has been teaching in the school for ten years. His experience bridges all age levels, but he has developed a particular interest with middle school-aged learners. In the process Merrick has developed many programs to ensure that boys, particularly, are excited about school and develop a love of learning. He is enthusiastic about making learning relevant and meaningful, using real life examples. Merrick focuses on using simulation games in the classroom to assist boys remain engaged in their learning through real life experiences. Merrick's email is <mekcaff@dcsi.net.au>

# Research Section

## Synergy: Coincidence or just a fluke?

**A tete-a-tete between the Boys In Schools literacy team and two Canadian researchers concluded that boys use literacy to help them be boys, regardless of where they live.**



It often happens that researchers from different parts of the world happen on similar concepts or ideas at the same time.

So it was with glee that the Boys In Schools literacy project team read and reread the Blair and Sanford research paper on boys and literacy. Their observations of boys in Canadian schools mirrored exactly what we had observed in our local schools.

We too had noticed that boys were doing all sorts of interesting things with reading and writing outside the constraints of *reading lessons*. They seemed to be far more competent in some areas of activity (such as computer use) than they were usually able to demonstrate in the classroom and, furthermore, they were adapting their literacy skills to serve their own purposes (for example, making Pokemon cards or setting up a footy-tipping competition).

Blair and Sanford confirmed our thoughts and even named the phenomena we were observing. They called it *morphing literacy* — boys shaping literacy to meet their own needs. They had also identified five themes in the type of written material that boys were using and how they were using it. They had established that:

- the materials had to be fun
- there had to be a purpose to the activity
- the activity needed to involve personal interest
- the activity had to include action
- the boys had to experience success in the activity

These researchers were looking at *what the boys were doing*, rather than *what they couldn't do*. This made perfect sense to us, of course, as we were looking at utilising individual and family strengths to assist boys in their literacy development.

Having established email contact with Heather Blair we discovered that she and Kathy Sanford were coming to Australia in July to present a paper at a conference in Melbourne. They would be spending a few days in Sydney first. Would they be interested in a sidetrip to Newcastle? Of course!

A working lunch by the harbour on a perfect winter's day was a wonderful start to their visit. And a great way to show off the best Newcastle had to offer.

Heather and Kathy met with Deborah Hartman and Victoria Clay from Boys In Schools, and Stephanie Tranter from the Engaging Fathers program to discuss our mutual areas of research, and to explore the subtleties of difference in the directions we are taking.

The Canadians are involved in teacher education in their respective universities and are very keen to promote a wider view of literacy, while the Boys In Schools program has developed a course in our master's program for teachers.

We discussed the origins of the Family Action Centre (FAC) and the types of programs we offer. Funding was a mutual *Big Issue*. Heather and Kathy were impressed, firstly that the Commonwealth Government had identified boys' education and literacy as an area of concern and, secondly, were willing to finance research and development programs. It emerged that Australia is well ahead of Canada in identifying boys' difficulties and developing programs to address them.

The researchers were very interested in one of our projects — the development of a literacy capacity inventory. The aim is to develop a questionnaire that identifies and highlights home-based literacy activities and interests, which can then be used to support classroom programs. Activities such as writing a shopping list, reading a street directory, downloading information from the web, and reading the sports results are all activities carried out daily which require literacy skills but which are so often overlooked. Both the Canadian and Australian researchers agreed that when considering strategies to assist boys develop literacy skills and to ensure continuing engagement, this was a good place to start.

Heather and Kathy had kindly agreed to do a workshop with a cluster of schools in Newcastle who are currently doing action research projects in boys' literacy and behaviour. Now, a workshop after school, on the last Monday of term, in the middle of winter, was a big ask of everyone. However, the dedication of Australian teachers showed through as 20 high school and primary teachers gathered for afternoon tea.

After explaining their project and the findings so far, they were careful to point out that this was an ethnographic study and no attempt had been made to adjust program content as yet. In fact, they said Australian teachers were probably in a better position to extrapolate the findings into classroom practice, as we had more experience in that area.

When Heather and Kathy outlined the five themes identified as important to boys' engagement in literacy, there was much head nodding (a sure sign they had hit the spot). Several teachers commented that this was a good place to start when looking at program content.

The draft capacity inventories are a useful tool for finding out the interests and strengths of the boys, and the male and female adults in their lives. For copies please contact Victoria Clay (details below).

It was a whirlwind visit and a wonderful opportunity to capitalise on some intellectual synergy.

*They called it morphing literacy — boys shaping literacy to meet their own needs.*

*These researchers were looking at what the boys were doing, rather than what they couldn't do.*

Victoria Clay has been involved in education for over 20 years — first as a primary school teacher and then as a psychologist and school counsellor. She is currently working part-time as the literacy project officer with the Boys In Schools program with the Family Action Centre. She also continues to work for the NSW Department of Education and Training as a school counsellor. Victoria's email is <Victoria.Clay@newcastle.edu.au>

# Morphing Literacy

**Research by Canadians Heather Blair and Kathy Sanford indicates that boys demonstrate literacy in ways the current curriculum doesn't assess.**



*The social nature of these boys' literacy practices started to become more obvious ... They used literacies to shape their identities and develop shared interests with friends.*

*We built a toothpick thing, a toothpick cube, and we used connectors, popsicles and puffed wheat, and plasticine and puffed wheat as connectors, and the plasticine held much more; . . . and you put a carton onto the cubes, and then you drop pennies in, and whichever one stays up the longest is the strongest structure.*

As this fourth-grade boy, Anthony, discussed the science demonstration that he had done at the student-led conference a few days before, it struck us how his manipulations of real-world things was typical of how we think of boys. Yet it is exactly these types of interactions that are overlooked in terms of recognising what literacy is for boys, or at least for some boys.

Boys' failure in schooling, particularly in areas of literacy, is increasingly alarming educators and parents. Educational research in Canada, Australia, Great Britain and United States has indicated concerns for boys. For example boys don't view education positively, don't like to read, and often don't read very well. In some countries, more boys are 'failing' at school and fewer of them are going on to post-secondary education. Debate about the seriousness of these claims continues to grow. However, the data may not tell the full story.

Boys are faced with many pressures as they enter and progress through school. There seem to be few acceptable gender positions for males. Boys are expected to be tough, competitive, and independent. Societal expectations direct boys to respond in particular ways; for example, loud, witty/mocking, individualistic, self-fulfilling. These behaviours often interfere with literacy success and skew teachers' perceptions of the boys' abilities and willingness to engage in literacy texts.

A recent two-year qualitative study examined early-adolescent boys' perceptions of literacy in relation to their literacy practices as evident in their 'in school and outside of school' activities. The schools were a rural-community school, an inner-city school, and one suburban school, all in Western Canada. The schools include children from diverse backgrounds.

Our initial findings were seductive and fit with common beliefs that schools are failing boys; that 'boys will be boys', they don't like to read and write, and they don't interact around literacy and don't have enough male models. However, this was not true for all of the boys and didn't seem to provide us with any depth of understanding of what they were doing.

The social nature of these boys' literacy practices started to become more obvious. Sometimes it was in the form of loud and boisterous sharing of comments across the entire room and other times the clustering around an activity, such as a computer game, that engaged them. We came to recognise literacy as a dominant social practice through which the boys in our study shaped their identities and developed and maintained close personal relationships, and often their literacies gave greater emphasis to taking from the text rather than poring over it, in order to share information with their friends. They used literacies to shape their identities and develop shared interests with friends.

These boys wrestled with making meaning of their school literacy experiences in relation to their out-of-school experiences and they talked

about their literacy practices overall. Five themes arose repeatedly in their comments:

- personal interest
- action
- success
- fun
- purpose

These boys were ‘morphing’ what they had learned in school and out of school, and they were transforming it for their own purposes in order to fulfil their need to position themselves in the world and to support their relationships with peers. They were transforming their own life literacies into their academic literacies in order to stimulate their real and imaginary lives that included challenge, risk, excitement, and opportunities to win. Through these transformations the boundaries of school and life literacies often become blurred. These five themes are interlocking pieces of a larger literacy profile and are instrumental in supporting their developing gendered identities.

When they had the opportunity, the boys chose reading selections that helped inform their personal interests, feeding their quest for their individual and collective identities and social communities. Often the boys reported choosing texts that connected to events that involved their relatives and friends, such as grandfathers in World War II, and fathers in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. One boy reported:

*A couple of months ago I wrote a letter to the Oilers [football team] because my friend, he has cancer. He's still in the hospital. I asked them if they could send him something, and they did. So they wrote me back, and they sent me two pictures, autographed pictures.*

The students were regularly required to take books out of the library, and some of their common reading choices included ‘how-to’ books, informational books, and fantasy. The out-of-school reading selected by these boys often supported their personal interests, such as newspapers, sports magazines, computer magazines telling them how to win at the computer games, superhero comic books, and other graphic texts. These texts were a marked contrast to their in-school selections and were not

seen as appropriate for in-school reading. These richly textured literacy artefacts played a major role in these boys’ out-of-school literate lives.

In terms of school-based activities, their creative writing often featured superhero characters, gang members, or fantasy figures that exhibited particular traits of strength or power. These had a particular appeal. One boy commented:

*You can make your characters anything you want, not like in the real world where you are limited to just everything a human can do . . . Your character can have all these adventures; every character can have their special magic that nobody else has.*

Boys’ personal interest in text is connected to the active emotional, mental, and physical engagement they experience and to the amount of success they experience in those engagements. Not only do they like to read and write about action, but they also ‘really want to get into the action’ themselves, to ‘do stuff’. They ‘don’t want to have to wait’. Early-adolescent boys also wanted to be challenged, but in contexts in which they felt confident of success or at least improvement. These boys often selected visual, humorous, and active texts such as comic books, magazines, and cartoon anthologies. It became apparent to us that a critical factor in selection of their readings was purposefulness, whether in getting information, figuring out how something works, keeping track of sports statistics, or staying connected with their friends.

Boys are often disadvantaged in academic literacy as a result of current curricular emphases, teacher text and topic choices, and lack of availability and acceptability of texts that match their interests and needs. The changing nature of literacy and the role of technology and boys’ underachievement in literacy may not readily translate to electronic technologies outside of school. Many boys have a great deal of expertise and interest in numerous forms of digital literacies, often much greater than their teachers. These literacies commonly inform and transform the strategies and discourses they use in school.

Despite the structured nature of classroom rules and expectations regarding learning and literacy, some boys have demonstrated alternative

*Boys’ personal interest in text is connected to the active emotional, mental, and physical engagement they experience . . .*

*The boys themselves are 'morphing' literacies to suit their purposes and, they are becoming literate in spite of school instruction.*

approaches to making meaning from school texts, attempting to transform traditional school literacies into something more useful and manageable to them, with some approaches more successful than others. In the past decade there has been considerable thought given to education for girls: how education can be structured, what curricular areas need focus and attention, and how to create successful environments for girls. However, the same thought has not been given to the curriculum as it is offered to boys.

School definitions of literacy have been slow to change, and slow to acknowledge the changing nature of literacy in society. There is a critical need to reframe the reading curriculum and to rethink assessment strategies and criteria to promote the kinds of literacy that are required in the workplace and in the home. There are many real constraints to change, both external and personal, that affect the possibilities for transformation. Externally imposed standardised testing, the increased emphasis on 'covering' the curriculum, fragmented timetables, and large groups of diverse students all distract teachers from considering more subtle issues affecting the learning of their students. Schools as historically constructed institutions are entrenched in society's collective understanding of what schooling is and should be; as such, there is considerable resistance to significant structural changes. Alternative 'texts' and 'literacies' are often dismissed as irrelevant to the agenda of school.

Teachers are products of teacher education programs that have not provided the time or space to address broad issues of literacy, gender, power, and other social-justice concerns. Therefore, their background knowledge and previous experiences of literacy learning, along with professional development models offering brief, one-time-only sessions, limit teachers' ability to closely examine their practices in light of intersecting factors such as gender. These external constraints also influence the types of activities generally found in classrooms, where critical literacy and the opportunities to understand the biased nature of language play a limited role in the overall educational experiences of students. Literacy is not recognised as a social practice but as either a body of knowledge to be absorbed or a tool for learning other bodies of knowledge that will be absorbed. Gender as a construct has been ignored in teacher education and curriculum, and often remains an unacknowledged factor in student learning.

Just as factors impacting boys' literacy are being ignored in classrooms, so are boys ignoring schooling practices that they see as boring, meaningless, and passive. The boys themselves are 'morphing' literacies to suit their purposes and, they are becoming literate in spite of school instruction. Boys and girls are engaging in literacy events outside of the classroom; however, although the literacies of girls are more aligned with practices encouraged by school (reading fiction, writing stories and poems) and are more compliant in the face of dull, meaningless activities, boys are better preparing themselves for the world beyond school. The abilities to navigate the Internet, experiment with alternative literacies, and 'read' multiple texts simultaneously are more useful workplace skills than is the ability to analyse a work of fiction or to write a narrative account.

As literacy educators of both boys and girls, it is vital that we increase opportunities for awareness, analysis, and action regarding issues of gender for ourselves and for our students. We can do this in many ways. However, we need to be cautious of overly simplistic solutions that suggest that we can motivate boys to read simply by introducing 'boy-friendly' literature and we need to be wary of literature that serves to reinforce undesirable stereotypes for boys.

In conclusion, it is evident that boys can read, but are selective in what they read; they use reading strategies that they have adopted in school and have morphed them to help make sense of new literacies that appeal to them. Teachers need to transform our ideas about literacy to help boys recognise their strengths and move them beyond their own to broader, more global literacies. We need to better understand their 'morphing literacies', critique the arguments that would position them as failing and remind ourselves that there are multiple definitions of literacy and multiple paths to becoming literate. We need to deepen our understandings of the subjectivity of literacies for both boys and girls given the socio-cultural configurations from which they emerge. We need to encourage our students to see the multiplicities of perspective and recognise the morphing of their own literacy practices.



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# Learning Styles:

## How can we best help boys to learn?

### Introduction

Some of the most important findings from the recently released House of Representatives Inquiry into the Education of Boys, *Boys: Getting it right*, were that boys need more active, hands-on methods of instruction, but that

*traditional schooling, whether primary or secondary, tends to favour passive learning and often does not cater well enough for those students who prefer interactive and experiential learning styles (p 79).*

The Inquiry saw past the red herring often forwarded by some (that individual differences are more important than gender differences) to find that there are valid generalisations about how most boys and most girls prefer to learn. It found that:

*Girls generally prefer verbal/linguistic and interpersonal/intrapersonal approaches.*

*Boys generally prefer mathematical/logical, spatial, hands-on approaches (pp 77–8).*

Therefore, one of its recommendations was :

*That the major focus of pre-service and in-service teacher education should be on equipping teachers to meet the needs of all boys and girls. This must include raising teachers' awareness of the differences and commonalities in the learning styles of boys and girls and the teachers' influence on student outcomes, and helping them develop balanced, effective and practical teaching strategies'.*

There should, therefore, be funding made available for

*additional professional development for practising teachers for this purpose, particularly targeting strategies that work with boys (Recommendation 2, pp xxv-xxvi).*

There is no doubt that the problem of accepting boys' preferred learning styles has been ignored for too long. More and more boys have become alienated from school by an increase in teaching styles that suit most girls but not most boys. In the 1980s learning styles was a fad in education circles, but quickly dropped as being too impractical to implement in the classroom. More recently, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences and De Bono's Thinking Hats have done the rounds of some schools but are still unknown in most classrooms. They are the victims of the crowded curriculum, of the increasing demands on teachers' time and of different priorities between teachers and bureaucrats. The losers are the children, and especially boys who, the Inquiry found, are much more likely to get frustrated with unfriendly teaching styles and demonstrate their disaffection in inappropriate ways (p 72). So, what do we do?

The following outlines a study I conducted throughout this year in a number of schools in which I teach as a casual teacher. It backs up what the Parliamentary Inquiry found and shows an urgent need for schools to teach in more boy-friendly ways. Too many boys are operating at frustration level

**From his research into the how boys learn, Tony Butz explains that the best tactic to help boys learn, is to teach them in ways that are friendly to their learning styles.**

from teaching methods that do not support male information processing patterns (see Butz, *What's Happening in Boys' Education?* No.12, No.14, No.15, No.16). In newsletter No. 17, I asked the boys themselves about going into high school and about seating arrangements in class. This study, however, was much bigger: over eight months, I asked over 500 children about their preferred learning styles.

## Preferred learning styles of boys and girls in Years 5 and 6

### Background

A number of different models have been used for studying students' learning styles. Each has had its advocates and critics, and each has practical strengths and weaknesses.

The Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument classified thinking preferences according to the four quadrants of the physical brain:

- Left-brain, cerebral: logical, analytical, quantitative, factual, critical
- Left-brain, limbic: sequential, organised, planned, detailed, structured
- Right-brain, limbic: emotional, interpersonal, sensory, kinaesthetic, symbolic
- Right brain, cerebral: visual, holistic, innovative.

Researchers using this instrument in the 1990s found that many of both college lecturers and successful students were left-brain thinkers; but many of those students dropping out were right-brain thinkers, leaving because they found the learning climate inhospitable.

The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator classified students according to their preferences based on Carl Jung's psychological theories:

- Extroverts (try things out, focus on people); or introverts (think things through, focus on ideas)
- Sensors (practical, focus on details, facts, procedures); or intuitors (focus on concepts, meanings, possibilities)
- Thinkers (sceptical, base decisions on logic and rules); or feelers (appreciative, base decisions on personal and humanistic considerations)

- Judgers (set and follow agendas, seek closure even with incomplete data); or perceivers (adapt to changing circumstances, resist closure to obtain more data)

These type preferences are combined to form 16 different learning styles. It has been found that engineering lecturers, for example, usually orient their courses towards introverts, intuitors, thinkers and judgers.

Kolb's Learning Style Model classified students according to how they take in information and how they process it, producing four learning types:

- Type 1: concrete, reflective (preferring teachers who motivate)
- Type 2: abstract, reflective (preferring knowledgeable, expert teachers)
- Type 3: abstract, active (preferring a coach who gives guided practice and feedback)
- Type 4: concrete, active (preferring teachers who stay out of the way and let them discover things for themselves)

To teach all types of learners, a teacher should explain the relevance of each new topic, present basic facts and methods, provide opportunities for practice, and encourage exploration of applications. This was referred to as 'teaching around the cycle'.

Markova's Thinking Patterns looked at the order in which children used visual, auditory and kinaesthetic channels to receive and process information consciously, subconsciously and unconsciously. She came up with six combinations of personal thinking patterns (VAK, VKA, AKV, AVK, KVA, KAV) and produced a Thinking Patterns Inventory of 15 questions for parents to answer about their children, then suggested different approaches to maximise the learning potential of each of the six types of thinkers.

The Felder–Silverman Learning Style Model recognised that students have different learning styles characterised by strengths and preferences in the ways they both take in and process information: some focus on facts and data, others on theories and models; some respond better to visual information, others to written information or the spoken word; some learn actively, others reflectively; some learn interactively, others individually. Good functioning, they found, requires working well in all learning modes, having a

balance across them. If teachers teach in ways that favour students' less-preferred learning styles, the students' discomfort levels may impede their learning; while teaching only in preferred learning styles does not develop the mental dexterity needed to reach full intellectual potential. They concluded that teachers should meet the learning needs of all students at least part of the time, and that this could be achieved by Kolb's idea of 'teaching around the cycle' of learning styles.

## Purpose of the study

There was a three-fold purpose to this study:

- To determine what proportion of children in their final two years of primary education had a balanced learning style that would equip them to handle most teaching styles and learning situations.
- To determine what gender differences existed in children's preferred learning styles.
- To determine what proportions of children, and of boys and girls separately, were at risk of being unable to perceive, process or utilise information in a typical classroom.

## Choosing a research instrument

The instrument used was a modified version of the Soloman and Felder Index of Learning Styles. It was modified because the original model was designed for college/university students rather than 10–12-year-olds. The original seemed to provide a good basis for an inventory of learning styles because it:

- examined four factors involved in learning: preferred type of information, preferred modality of learning, preferred method of processing the information and preferred development of understanding
- recognised that preferences are not dichotomies but continuums
- gave a measure of the degree to which a student relies on any one of these
- has been used successfully (at university level) to successfully lower students' dissatisfaction with courses and the attrition rate in early years
- could be asked orally, leaving students merely to tick a box labelled 'a' or 'b',

therefore, not disadvantaging poorer readers

The original number of 44 questions was retained, as were the four factors above. The modified instrument was trialed, revised twice and finally administered in its final form to the sample group.

In the modified index used in this survey, each question asked respondents to choose between two different possibilities for each of the four learning factors mentioned above, and 11 questions were asked for each factor. The choices for each factor were:

- Active Processing (learning by doing, by trying things out, by bouncing ideas off others)
- Reflective Processing (learning by thinking things through before trying them out, individually or just in pairs)
- Sensory Perception (getting information through sight, sound, physical work)
- Intuitive Perception (getting information through memory, ideas, insights)
- Visual Input (pictures, diagrams, charts, demonstrations, maps)
- Verbal Input (sounds, speech, written words, formulas)
- Sequential Understanding (a logical progression of small, connected steps)
- Global Understanding (large, holistic jumps in understanding)

Soloman and Felder found that scores of 1–4 in any factor indicated a balance along the continuum within that factor; scores of 5–8 indicated a distinct preference for one way of learning over the other in each factor but an ability to use the other as back-up; and scores of 9–11 as extreme dependence on one way of learning within that factor. They discovered that, if teachers taught principally one way in any modality, then a student with an extreme position at the other end of the continuum would not be able to learn effectively and could become very frustrated and disengaged from the learning process. All these aspects of the original inventory were seen as valuable and were, therefore, retained in the modified form, which changed only the wording of the questions to make them intelligible to 10–12-year-olds.

## Sample

The sample surveyed consisted of 533 children (271 boys and 262 girls) in Years 5 and 6, at eight different schools (five public, two Catholic and one independent) in the Blue Mountains and Penrith area of NSW. They were in 21 classes, all unstreamed (except for one gifted class) and co-educational. The age range was 10 to 12 years, and the survey took place from April to November 2002.

## Organisation

The survey was conducted each time as part of a normal day's casual teaching. Children were first asked about what they thought were their strengths in schoolwork, then asked to complete the survey. They were told they could either write their names or make it anonymous, but needed to tick the male/female box at the side. At the end of the survey session, children were shown how to tally their scores, and the meanings of the column headings were then explained, along with the scores.

## Results

### Balance in learning styles

The percentages of all children, of all boys and of all girls, with a balanced learning style in each factor (i.e. scores of 1–4) are given in table 1.

It can be seen that in both active and reflective processing, about two-thirds of all students (and of boys and of girls) had a balance that would enable them to handle a variety of requirements for processing information. The same can be said for their progress towards understanding, with a balance of Sequential Thinking and Global Understanding. Less than half of all students used Sensory and Intuitive Perception with any balance; and the smallest area of balance was in Visual and Verbal Input, where less than 40% of the whole sample, and less than 30% of all boys had a balance.

### Dominant learning styles

By tallying the scores (of 5–11) within each of the eight variants over the four continuums, it can be

Table 1. Percentages of children with balanced learning modalities

	Active & Reflective Processing	Sensory & Intuitive Perception	Visual & Verbal Input	Sequential & Global Understanding
% of total	65.6%	48.0%	39.9%	67.8%
% of boys	64.1%	51.5%	29.4%	65.4%
% of girls	67.2%	44.6%	50.4%	70.2%

Table 2. Percentages of children with dominant learning styles

	Active	Reflective	Sensory	Intuitive	Visual	Verbal	Sequential	Global
% of total	27.6%	6.7%	9.2%	42.7%	56.3%	3.7%	10.2%	22.0%
% of boys	30.8%	5.1%	13.2%	35.3%	67.7%	2.9%	5.9%	28.7%
% of girls	24.4%	8.4%	5.3%	50.1%	45.0%	4.6%	14.5%	15.3%

Table 3. Percentages of children with extreme learning styles

	Active	Reflective	Sensory	Intuitive	Visual	Verbal	Sequential	Global
% of total	5.2%	2.6%	1.5%	16.5%	30.0%	0%	0%	5.6%
% of boys	7.4%	2.9%	2.2%	13.2%	36.8%	0%	0%	9.6%
% of girls	3.0%	2.3%	0.8%	20.0%	22.9%	0%	0%	1.5%

ascertained what the dominant or preferred learning styles were of these respondents in the sample. The results are given in table 2.

In processing information, more than a quarter of the total sample preferred to do so actively, with somewhat more boys than girls being active learners. In choosing what information to process, more than half of the sample preferred to use memory, insights and ideas over other sensory input, with girls doing this significantly more than boys. The largest differences within a learning factor occurred in preferred modalities through which information is most readily perceived: over half of all children surveyed were dominantly visual (less than 4% were dominantly verbal); and an even larger difference resulted amongst boys with over two-thirds of all boys sampled being dominantly visual (and only 3% verbal). In progressing toward understanding of a subject, one-fifth of all students understood by making big jumps in thinking and by relating new material to things already understood, rather than by working sequentially through it. Of these, there were nearly twice as many boys as girls who preferred to understand in this fashion.

### Extreme learning styles

Those who scored 9–11 in any column of choices showed an extreme learning style within that factor, being dependent on processes at only one end of the continuum. The percentages of students demonstrating this are given in table 3.

Very small percentages of students had extreme learning styles in most areas. The exceptions were in Visual Input and Intuitive Perception where very high percentages of children had extreme preferences. This result is even more marked when one notes that boys made up most of the visual extremists, with over one-third of all boys surveyed being extremely dependent on visual information. In other gender comparisons: more than twice as many boys as girls were extreme in their need for active learning and more than six times as many boys preferred an extremely global or holistic approach to understanding. It will also be noted that in the entire sample there was not a single extreme position, among boys or girls, for either Verbal Input or Sequential Understanding learning.

## Discussion of results

### Balance in learning styles

While it is encouraging that two-thirds of all students had what seems to be a good balance in learning styles, to think that one-third did not (and that boys fared worse than girls in three of the four factors) is a matter of considerable concern. It is especially worrying that just over 70% of boys relied heavily on visual information (as opposed to the written or spoken word). To a lesser extent, girls had significantly less balance in their preferences for types of information (i.e. in balancing immediate visual, auditory and tactile input with ideas, insights and memory).

### Dominant learning styles

It may have been expected, given the ages of the children sampled, that the majority would prefer to learn actively rather than reflectively. What is significant, however (because of the tendency to insist on quiet, orderly classrooms with little physical activity), is that while three times as many girls preferred active to reflective learning, six times as many boys had a dominant preference for learning this way — nearly one-third of all boys sampled. How many actually get the opportunity to learn in a predominantly active way?

When confronted with a lot of information we all have to choose which information to process and make use of. Three times as many boys (and ten times as many girls) preferred to use memory, insight and intuition over sensory input. This suggests a need for teachers to ensure they relate material to things children already know something about, rather than as something entirely new, and to allow opportunity to get information from a variety of sources.

Again, it is not surprising that over half of all children were heavily dependent on visual information. Language, reading comprehension and aural comprehension are still developing even in later primary years. But it is of concern that over two-thirds of all boys (but less than half of all girls) were very dependent on visual information. These children would be considerably disadvantaged by tasks and tests that were highly verbal (in either printed material or the spoken word) yet this is by far the most common sort of exercise even in primary schools, and gets even 'worse' in secondary and tertiary education. While 'chalk and talk' or the printed worksheet remain the mainstay of education, the very high

proportion of boys who are visual/spatial learners are distinctly disadvantaged, as they are not being taught in ways that suit their dominant learning style. Too much frustration from being unable to learn in boy-friendly ways causes disaffection with the schooling process.

Somewhat of a surprise was the finding that nearly twice as many children preferred a global approach to understanding something, as opposed to a sequential approach. But the greater surprise was that, while for girls there were almost equal numbers preferring sequential and global understanding, for boys twice as many preferred global to sequential approaches. Aren't males supposed to be the logical, mathematical thinkers, and therefore the sequential thinkers? But a seemingly contrary result emerged. And aren't females supposed to be better at utilising the two halves of the brain to see the big picture better than males do? On asking boys and girls later about their thoughts on their survey scores, some frequent refrains from the boys were: 'I don't mind being told what to do in school, but I don't like being told how to do it'; and 'Why do we have to explain how we get an answer when half the time you just don't know', and 'What about "a picture is worth a thousand words"? — I'd rather draw what I think than write about it'. From the girls, it was quite common to hear, 'I don't actually like maths; I'm just good at it', and 'I'd enjoy chess if it wasn't a competition. Boys get too competitive about it.' Could it be that there is a closer link between the visual/verbal preferences for information and the sequential/global ways of processing that information than we have previously thought? Professor Felder has found that 'sequential learners can solve problems with incomplete understanding of the material and their solutions are generally orderly and easy to follow, but they may lack a grasp of the big picture — the broad context of a body of knowledge and its interrelationships with other subjects and disciplines. Global learners work in a more all-or-nothing fashion and may appear slow and do poorly on homework and tests until they grasp the total picture, but once they have it they can often see connections to other subjects that escape sequential learners.'

### Extreme learning styles

Students with extreme learning styles may be highly gifted in that area but may also be highly frustrated if most teaching uses the other end of

the continuum. A student highly gifted in the verbal area is usually no problem in class and may even be admired by the teacher, but what of students highly gifted in active learning and visual perception? They usually get labelled ADHD (= a behaviour problem). More than twice as many boys as girls in the survey fitted this profile of a learner — someone who must learn by doing and for whom the visual is extremely dominant. Is this why so many boys (possibly one-third of all boys in middle and upper primary school) see the school's expectation of them to be 'sit down and shut up'? Given that it has been established that teachers' teaching styles reflect their own preferred learning styles, with an increasingly female teaching workforce, this may be why so many young males feel that teachers don't understand them or don't care about what they think.

After preference for visual information, the next highest score for extreme positions, for both boys and girls, was the intuitive dimension. Students with extreme positions here (13.2% of boys and 20% of girls) must be able to use ideas, insights and theories to understand material; their enemy is the written comprehension, which expects regurgitation of what is in a text. And, although there were more girls than boys in this extreme position, the boys' dependence on visual rather than verbal information puts them in a more difficult position than the girls, who, at this age, are usually 18 months developmentally ahead of boys verbally. Exercises that deal principally with recall of facts, working through examples and endless repetition do not serve these students well and tend to leave them wondering about the relevance of education. They need to be allowed to be innovative and to see things differently from how the teacher or others in the class see things.

### Conclusion

The study revealed a lot of useful information about how children, and boys and girls separately, prefer to learn. It showed that many children are heavily dependent on dominant ways of learning and are at risk of missing out on learning and understanding if teaching methods do not match their learning styles. For boys, especially, it is likely that standard classroom teaching practices are not being particularly effective in enabling them to learn at their best. While it is good for children (and adults for that matter) to be taught in ways that appeal to our favoured learning modalities, it

is also necessary to develop a balance in one's learning style so that some learning can take place regardless of the teaching style/learning style differences. For too many children, however, and again for boys especially, it seems likely from this study that they are disengaged or even frustrated for much of the time in many learning situations, because they tend to be more extreme in the way they receive and process information.

The Modified Learning Styles Index appears to have served its purpose well. There were no problems in administration, despite a wide cross-section of abilities, and it provided the information needed to investigate what it set out to do. Several teachers suggested it would be a useful exercise both to do the survey themselves (to discover their own learning style and see how closely it matched the way they teach) and to give the survey to their classes at the start of a school year so that they were armed with a knowledge of how each child learnt best. It would also be useful to in-service these teachers on how to then 'teach around the cycle' so that they could be of the greatest help to all their children. (Some ideas for doing so can be found at the website quoted in the references.)

For those teachers who have tried unsuccessfully to cater for different learning styles in their classrooms in the past, for those who have always thought it was too difficult to do, and for those who have never seen the need for it, the time has come to do something practical. As the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Boys has stated in its report *Boys: Getting it right*:

*Australian and international research concludes that the influence of classroom teachers on the learning outcomes of students exceeds all other factors including school factors and socio-economic factors. In fact Australian research concluded that effective schools are only effective to the extent that they have effective teachers. (p 85)*

Without waiting for governments to act on the findings of the report, paying closer attention to children's learning styles is something we can all do now, to help get it right for boys.

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# Secondary Section

## Reading Champions

**At our recent Boys In Schools conference, director of the UK National Literacy Trust, Neil McClelland, discussed the concept of Reading Champions, a literacy program that has been particularly successful for boys. We followed up with Grace Bowman from the National Reading Campaign to find out how it works.**

Reading Champions was initiated by the National Reading Campaign\* in 1999 to try to provide boys with positive examples of reading men who they could identify with and relate to. Reading Champions also aims to support families, carers and practitioners in helping to create an environment where every boy has access to a positive male reading role model.

Indeed its reach has extended beyond the issue of boys and reading, to concern about men's learning and literacy skills. The Campaign was keen to identify men who could act as advocates for reading and spur other adults on to discover the enjoyment and interest that reading can bring.

The Campaign's long-term aims included creating an environment wherein boys and men would be able to enjoy reading and thereby reverse the statistical trend; to raise literacy standards among men and boys and narrow the gender gap; to increase men's involvement with their children's reading; and to support a strong profile for work promoting reading and literacy to men and boys. Providing a platform for this work gave the opportunity for smaller projects in this area to link into a national agenda.

### What do Reading Champions do?

The idea of Reading Champions is to identify and celebrate those who have acted as positive role models. Anyone can nominate someone they know as a Reading Champion. A Reading Champion can be any man or boy who has turned others into readers or who is proud to be a reader himself.

Now in its fourth year, the scheme continues to recruit famous men, including footballers and authors, to act as reading role models. Importantly, it also invites nominations from the many not-so-famous champions — such as dads, teenagers, volunteer readers, teachers, librarians — who make a real difference on the ground.

Every nominee receives a certificate and a badge and is featured on the Campaign website so that their activities in support of reading are recognised more widely. The Campaign requires that each Champion fill out a questionnaire about their reading habits to provide teachers and other educational professionals with examples of reading men to be used as examples both in and out of the classroom. In a broader context, the Champions exist to provide inspiration and validation to boys and men that reading is something that might be an extension of their interests and not opposed to them.

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\*Reading Champions is run by the National Reading Campaign, a government-funded project, which continues the work of the National Year of Reading, which took place in the UK between 1998 and 1999. The Campaign is housed within the independent charity the National Literacy Trust.

Reading Champions vary in their involvement in the role beyond their answers to these reading questionnaires. At the end of the year the Campaign holds an awards ceremony to celebrate the work of the Reading Champions and to raise the profile of the scheme. Many Champions continue to keep the Campaign informed of their work. Some get asked to participate in local events, or volunteer to visit schools and libraries and talk about their reading experiences. One, businessman Paul Hallam, was featured in a major BBC reading program, *The BBC Big Read*. Reading Champion Paul Sleem from Manchester delivered an after-dinner speech at the Local Government Association conference in June this year.

### Who can be a Reading Champion? Reading Champions beyond the classroom

- Prisoners who help their friends with reading and writing
- A coordinator or participants in a school reading week
- Dads, grandads, family friends or brothers who help children with their reading
- Male adult basic-skills tutors who encourage other men to learn new skills
- A male teacher who runs a reading club
- Men or boys who participate in a reading buddy scheme
- Male storytellers or performers
- Businessmen who encourage literacy development or provide reading matter for their employees
- Men or boys who are involved in community-based reading initiatives

Certain examples of role model involvement have much wider potential and lead the way when

thinking of how to practically implement a Champions scheme:

### What sort of men and boys get nominated?

**Men from the community** who are not teachers, or those associated with being part of the education system are often nominated as Reading Champions. Using role models from outside the school, or members of the school community who are not traditionally associated with reading such as the school caretaker or kitchen staff, helps boys see reading as an activity, which extends beyond the classroom and into their own lives.

**Peer partners** in schools projects give children who have perhaps experienced reading difficulties in the past the chance to work with those younger children who are struggling. Both sets of children gain skills and confidence through their involvement. Reading Champion, 16-year-old Dean Simpson, was involved in such a scheme, acting as a book buddy for reception-class pupils. His nomination came from a literacy development worker for a community-wide language and literacy initiative, which runs the 'book buddy' scheme.

Many Reading Champion nominations are for those who take part in **company mentor schemes** where business people act as role models for schoolchildren. Mentoring helps pupils articulate their own understanding of what they have to do to improve. Reading Champion Mike Hill from Nottingham is an assistant support analyst. He is a volunteer reader at the primary

*The idea of Reading Champions is to identify and celebrate those who have acted as positive role models.*



*Through a partnership with England's Football Premier League there is now a Reading Champion in every Premiership team.*



# Paul Oakenfold

puts reading into the mix

Ibiza - Pacha  
perfect  
New York  
Los Angeles  
Superstar DJ  
Gatecrasher  
Perfecto Reading  
Sydney

 For more about Reading Champions  
[www.readon.org.uk](http://www.readon.org.uk) tel: 020 7828 2435

school he attended as a child and became involved with helping children to read through his company's community investment program.

Most Reading Champions cite paying particular attention to the **boys' individual interests** as a way of introducing them to the idea of reading. Reading Champion and prison officer Graham Barlow comments:

*I encourage young men to read by finding out their interests, thus being able to assist in choosing a suitable book. Being male, it is useful because I often have the same enthusiasm for those things.*

Widening the idea of reading to include 'beyond books' encourages those who don't think of themselves as traditional readers. Suggested ideas include tabloid reading groups, and comics and graphic novel displays. This kind of extended and enhanced provision of books and other texts, which include boys' preferences, is shown to engage boys with reading.

The campaign has also used the power of the **celebrity male** to persuade boys and young men that reading is an acceptable partner to music, sports or other activities. Harnessing the influence of well-known sportsmen, including leading footballers, DJs and TV stars, has brought reading into the media spotlight. There is a need to maintain integrity when using well-known role models — they must be people who genuinely believe in the message they are giving or they will not be effective or convincing. These famous Champions have a very different role to community Reading Champions, but in combination with community and peer role models they can serve to add value to the reading message.

Through a partnership with England's Football Premier League there is now a Reading Champion in every Premiership team. The project, entitled 'Reading — The Game', has brought football and reading very closely together. Each Champion has been asked to nominate his two favourite books, one adult, one kids, and to talk about why he thinks reading is important. David Seaman, England goalkeeper, tells us, 'I was very busy playing sport at school, but I always tried to find time to read. I knew it was important to my development.' Charlton FC's Chris Bart Williams agrees, 'You really need to be an intelligent quick thinker on the football field and I believe that reading challenges you and encourages you to

think ahead — strengthens your all-round ability to anticipate situations, including on the pitch.'

Partnership has also been a key to working into different organisations' reading agendas. There are benefits to be gained from a wholesale, institutional buy-in to schemes rather than a more random approach. This promotes partnership working, is an efficient way of involving greater numbers of people, and provides a higher profile for learning and reading. The National Reading Campaign has worked with a wide range of partners to encourage nominations over the last few years. These include:

- volunteering organisations
- community literacy initiatives
- organisations promoting fathers/male carers involvement
- prison libraries and education networks
- the football community
- adult basic-skills networks
- school and public libraries networks
- Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities areas
- early years networks

This year the campaign continues its search for Reading Champions and to develop and extend the role of its existing Champions. Existing Champions have been spurred on by the recognition they have been given and continue to be powerful advocates for reading. Quantifying their impact is difficult, but listening to their stories and meeting those they have inspired suggests the power of an individual to really make a difference.

Reading Champions can support, motivate, encourage and inspire boys to read. Their experience provides ideas and pointers as to how to help boys and men feel that they have a place as a reader in a school, community, work or family setting. If a Reading Champion can help another boy or man to feel reading is not something, which excludes or embarrasses him, but is something that engages him, then it is surely an important contribution to helping them achieve their potential.

*A Reading Champion can help another boy or man to feel reading is not something, which excludes or embarrasses him, but is something that engages him.*



## Some further ideas in practice

- Design posters or events to get boys into reading i.e. local sports teams can invite members to a 'sporting reads' evening
- Reading groups
- Use photographs of men on the staff and from the local community reading, with quotes about what they read and why; include photographs of boys from the school to create a 'real men read' display
- Train older students to become reading buddies for the younger ones
- Create screen-savers of recommended reads; recommend comics, graphic novels, magazines and non-fiction as well as fiction — challenge the expectations of students
- Put book reviews or book bites on the school website or use the school intranet to promote good reads
- Establish tabloid reading groups — showing that reading is beyond books and the classics — most of us read without thinking about it

## Reading Champion: Case studies

**Sam Ghinai** is a pupil librarian who helps in the school library before school and at lunchtime. Sam enjoys talking about books with other pupils and often recommends books to them. He is a keen member of the Teenage Reading Group at his local public library, which meets to discuss books. Sam encourages his family to read and discuss books, especially his younger brother Isaac, who is fast becoming a Reading Champion himself.

**Paul Blum** is a teacher and writer of fiction for children with special needs. Paul has written a

series of books called *The Extraordinary Files* and a literacy workshop book *The Chelsea Bunny*, with his pupils' input and illustration, as an aid to help motivate children to enjoy reading and boost their reading skills.

**David McMaster** was nominated as a Reading Champion by school librarian Eileen Armstrong. Eileen writes: 'David started Year 9 as not just a resistant reader but a self-confessed and completely disinterested non-reader. I persuaded him to try *Skellig* and his friends persuaded him to come along to an after-school reading group. Reading didn't come naturally but David persevered and became one of the keenest readers, helping organise author visits, talking to visiting reporters about books and his "conversion" and reading draft manuscripts for authors such as Melvin Burgess, Anthony Fusek Peters and David Belbin. Now in Year 12, David assists in the day-to-day running of the school library and works as an inspiring reading buddy on the paired reading scheme for Curriculum Support Department with reluctant Year 9 readers.'

**Sam Suraj Singh**, an inmate at a young offenders institute in Hindley has been nominated by prison librarian Denis Whelan. Denis writes: 'Sam is an avid reader, who enjoys reading fiction and non-fiction. Sam is now hoping to apply the knowledge he has gained through reading to set up an advisory service for young offenders.'

**Dave Collett**, a community policeman, has been a Reading Friend with children in Huddersfield for over a year. He also encouraged two of his colleagues to become Reading Friends in other schools in the area. Following the success of Dave's experience, his manager in the Police Force gave him the go ahead for six or seven more police officers to be trained as Reading Friends.

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# Boys 'n' Books

## The philosophy

Boys 'n' Books was set up because of a genuine concern expressed by senior students who felt that generally they had not read as effectively in high school as they had in primary school. They thought that they might have experienced more success in high school had they been better readers. They believed their chances were affected by experiences of difficulty, and even failure, in reading in the early years of their schooling. Had they experienced success early, their life chances might have been better. Alerted to this concern, several key staff members attended conferences promoting boys' literacy development and these in turn provided the enthusiasm, direction and impetus, which led to the trial and subsequent inclusion of the Boys 'n' Books program in the school's calendar.

Boys 'n' Books is a six-week peer-tutoring program in literacy, where Year 8 boys from Gordonvale High School tutor Year 2 boys from two nearby primary schools.

Boys 'n' Books is now in its third year. It continues to evolve, providing opportunities for Year 10s to assume leadership roles, Year 9s to be further challenged supporting Year 3s, and a new crop of Year 8 reading tutors eager to continue the good work of their predecessors in helping Year 2 students to delve into books.

## Set up

Gordonvale State High School initiated the program. Initially, contact with the primary schoolteachers was made incidentally in order to judge their receptivity to the project. Later as the project evolved, formal meetings were held to clarify the processes. Prior to launching into planning any recruitment and training of tutors, time was spent debating the possible outcomes for all. It was essential to establish our goals and how these would link to those of the primary schools.

### Their benefits

- help for poor readers
- trained reading tutors
- tutors were teenage boys — peers, not adults
- a six-week intervention support program
- positive contact between high school and primary school students
- students' attitude to reading improved
- reading ability improved

### Our benefits

- students acquired good reading strategies
- raised student self-esteem
- a sense of achievement as readers progressed
- shared learning as our students became teachers
- positive links between schools
- better understanding of the reading process by all involved

**Annette Peach and Peter Hughes from Gordonvale State High School outlined their peer mentor reading program at our recent conference. Here's a synopsis, plus a personal interview with Annette to find out about her experiences with the program.**





## Timing

Through discussions, we established that the most effective time for implementation from the primary school's perspective would be after the administration of the Year 2 Diagnostic Net, and the subsequent moderation process which formally confirmed students identified at risk of reading failure. So we planned to prepare students and have them ready for the six-week intervention block early in term 4. Our target group was to be Year 2 students, identified by the Net as being Phase A readers, and perhaps early Phase B readers. Their tutors were to be recruited from the Year 8 male cohort, and tutoring would be scheduled to take place once a week during a designated maths lesson.

## Student recruitment and interviewing process

Recruitment in the first year of the project was both by invitation and by calling for volunteers. All students who registered their interest were required to undergo an interview process. During the interview they were called upon to read an unseen passage (selected from *The Philosopher's Stone*), bring a prepared reading of their own choice, and to respond to key questions posed by the panel. Panel members were made up of male teachers from the maths department, the boys' school captain, a supportive English teacher and the learning support teacher. This group went on to become the key people involved in developing the program.

Students were trained as reading tutors using a program developed by the learning support teacher loosely based on Support a Reader, Neurological Impressed Method, peer tutoring and Pause–Prompt–Praise strategies. Training was allocated to two 70-minute sessions with a follow-up session after commencing the program. These training sessions were scheduled in Year 8 maths lesson times and used some of the students' own break time. The student training program examined the reading process, what to do when readers made errors, how to support attempts to decode, and how to monitor progress. We touched on some basic behaviour management techniques and clarified reading tutors' responsibilities. Tutors were required to keep a record of the reading each session in their tutor's diary, noting issues or questions that they could raise later at the debriefing sessions, and to keep a learning journal

recording their own learning journey. Incentives for the readers were provided and tutors encouraged to praise good reading and to award merit stickers for progress in reading.

## The six-week program

Reading tutors were linked with the students through discussion between the Year 2 teacher and the secondary head of department and learning support teacher to match personalities, temperaments and, where possible, cultural backgrounds. This is a very important step as it is essential that once linked the tutors and readers remain the same. Aspects of respect, friendship and continuity of support, and bonding are important.

Reading tutors were encouraged to chat informally before and after reading in a manner that encouraged their relationship to develop. This also provides an opportunity for aspects of oral language, such as conversational skills and oral expression, to develop. Students required parental permission and support for participation in the program. The Year 8 maths program of work was adapted to allow their involvement and reading sessions were juggled to fit timetables, students giving up some of their recess to walk to and from the nearby primary school. From the time the boys left to the time they returned took about an hour. Tutors were accompanied by interested teachers who were available.

Reading tutors were provided with a name badge and folder in which to keep their tutor's diary, training booklet, learning journal and incentive stickers. On arrival at the classrooms, tutors would meet their reading partner, select a book from the Reading Recovery–levelled class book resources, and then proceed to an adjacent area where they would then read together following the reading process:

- Introduce the new book, predicting the text and the vocabulary from the cues
- Reading tutor models the reading process
- Tutor and reader read text together
- Reader attempts to read unassisted whilst the tutor uses Pause–Prompt–Praise strategy to support
- On completion of the reading they review and discuss the text shared
- The reading tutor praises the effort of the reader and rewards him a sticker



What are missing from this conference paper are the personal anecdotes, which tell the human side of the story. So for those of you who couldn't be there, the *Bulletin* talked to Annette Peachman, to find out the what's at the heart of this program.



***Annette, unlike many peer programs, you don't seem to pick the high achievers as mentors.***

We attract the larrikins. We made a conscious decision to target boys who are having problems. I think that's what gives me a real buzz — dealing with these guys. They go back to the primary schools where their lasting memories tended not to be good ones. We spend a lot of time saying: 'It might be a bit daunting. The last time you were at the primary, you were suspended or on detention or you were always in trouble, but you're going back in a different mode'. Before we go I talk about how they will be viewed differently, and what they can do if we see some of the kids who remember them as the naughty guys. They all handle that very well.

We have Year 8 guys who have been kicked out of home for different reasons and they've worked with some of the primary kids who are already facing that situation. We have four mentors who are diagnosed ADHD, so when we had to work with a Year 1 boy, who was thought to be a fairly difficult-to-manage ADHD student, one of our boys was able to identify with this little guy and provide a really good role model.

***How do you get the older boys to open up to you?***

The program allows us to get close to these boys. When we prepare them for going to the primary school, we talk about personal issues in the third person. We say things like: 'When you are working with these little kids these are some of the problems they might be encountering at home, in the classroom, in the playground.' We act out scenarios, which often encourage the kids to disclose what's happened to them, how they handled the situation or how they've seen someone else handle it really well. Even though we talk in the third person, they can start applying some of these solutions to themselves.

We get to know their quirks and some of the family backgrounds that they bring with them. We help them deal with their baggage to make them stronger.

At the end of every session we have a debrief, where they talk about their experience with the group. We often bring in some of the past members of the program to talk about how it was for them, or for specific issues we might encourage a mentor to talk individually to one of the Year 10s. In response the Year 10 boy might



suggest we keep an eye on a certain student or a certain situation. So the past members become mentors to the present members. There's a big brother structure embedded in the program.

### ***How does this program help the Year 8 boys?***

Initially the Year 8 boys are often quiet and shy. They've come from primary school where they were top of the hierarchy, where they had a sense of being important. Suddenly in high school, they are the little guys, the guys that everyone tends to pick on or shove around. They are not quite sure how to approach teachers or how to talk to them.

You can pick the boys who have been on the program. The teachers say they know the boys by the way they speak to the teachers, by the way they are quite comfortable coming up and talking to the teachers and sharing their concerns.

Our mentors haven't necessarily become better readers but they have definitely become better people. They're better regarded in the school, even though they're the larrikins. They've been given the chance to be successful and they have been gracious in accepting that chance. When a stranger congratulates them on how well they presented at conferences or a teacher praises the way they've been working with a student, that's when I realise how far these boys have come.

At our school no one wants to go for school captain or sports captains. There is a feeling that if you are the tall poppy, someone will knock you down. Our boys, who are going on to Year 11, are now saying that they want to go for some leadership roles in the school because they have had a taste of what it is like.

### ***What motivates the boys to get involved in the program?***

I think what motivates them initially is getting out of maths, coupled with the notoriety that's been built up over the years — that you can get Coke and pizza at the end of missing out of maths for a few weeks!

But our direct approach really helps. We say to them: 'Listen we've got this program. We would like you to be part of it. Would you like to come and check it out?'

The personalities of the teachers involved are also important. Peter's the football coach, so the guys are comfortable with him already. I'm the learning support teacher so they are used to bearing their

souls to us, and not being judged because they are not very good at things. I guess both of us are reassuring when we are dealing with the boys and we both have a warped sense of humour, so that tends to appeal.

### ***Over your four-year involvement, what did you get out of this personally?***

I think the greatest satisfaction is the relationship that I have with the students. I know that personally it has helped in classroom discipline. The kids are more respectful. I am not someone remote who stands out, who they don't want to talk to. When I'm on playground duty, I have students who come over and say hello and Peter is the same. They badger us all the time.

Personally, I just love seeing kids read, and over the years I have seen the enjoyment that they have gained from reading and books in general.

### ***Any advice that you would offer people?***

The thing that I would say is to just have a go and see what works for you. You'll just grow. Whatever you do, you will grow. Especially if the enthusiasm is embedded in the program and the intent is there to work with kids for the benefit of all the kids involved.

As learning support services coordinator, Annette Peach teaches in the maths department at Gordonvale State High School. Her prior experiences include a background in P-12 Learning Support with students experiencing learning difficulties, primary administration, and performance measurement involving Year 2 Diagnostic Net and Years 3, 5 and 7 tests. Annette is also a First Steps literacy tutor, currently involved in the professional development course Stepping Out. Annette can be contacted on email <annette.peach@gordonvashs.qld.edu.au> or by telephoning (07) 4043 3217.

Peter Hughes has a BSc/Grad Dip and is currently the head of department of maths at Gordonvale High School. Peter was in the position of acting deputy when he started the Boys 'n' Books program. Peter can be contacted on <pjhug2@gordonvashs.qld.edu.au>.

# The Brain Module

**Diane McRoberts' Brain Module helps students discover where their learning difficulties lie and develop ways to overcome them by creating their own unique learning profile.**

St James College is a Christian Brothers School of 450–500 students across Years 8–12. Although it is a coeducational school, there are three times as many boys as girls. An inner city school, it draws from a very diverse, multicultural community. It has a high percentage of students for whom English is a second language, with about 30 full-paying overseas students and almost 30 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students. It attracts quite a diverse range of students, from those with difficulties in literacy and numeracy to very capable and gifted and talented.

The school has a vertical modular curriculum. There are core subjects like English, maths and religion. Science and social science are part-core — students don't have to lock into them for two whole years. Students are allowed to choose and change electives every term. The school offers units of work in 10-week blocks. This is one reason the school attracts a lot of students with literacy support needs because they get bursts of success in the modules of their own choice and they can choose things at which they excel and which interest them.

There is also a very high focus on pastoral care and relationships in the school. Because of the range of students who attend the school this is a priority, and being an Edmund Rice school, there is a strong focus on social justice, participation and inclusion. The school operates on a total inclusion model so there is no withdrawal of students who struggle.

## ***What motivated you to develop the Brain Module?***

My original motivation in adopting this approach came from my work teaching literacy to classes of angry, unmotivated Year 11 and 12 young men who were in that downward negative spiral after years of not succeeding. By focusing on their learning styles and gaining an understanding of why they had difficulties, their attitudes gradually turned around and they started experiencing some success with literacy tasks.

Consequently, the focus of The Brain Module is about students taking a proactive approach to own their own learning by assisting them to discover their unique learning profile, identify their strengths and lesser strengths and develop strategies for success across the curriculum.

## ***So how do you go about that?***

Every Year 8 student who comes into the school does The Brain Module, which is a five-week program of three periods per week. Students are introduced to the learning/thinking process, knowing more about the role of their brain, understanding the learning process and then being able to identify their own learning style.

The focus is that we are all unique. They complete checklists to identify their strongest multiple intelligence, their preferred learning style and their most dominant side of their brain. They come away with the idea that we are all capable of learning but we all just do it differently.

Once they understand how everyone learns, we talk about auditory and visual processing difficulties and it starts to make sense to them. They feel that they are not alone, they are not 'dumb', it's just their style of learning. They also feel more comfortable if everyone is going through the process at the same time.

## ***How is The Brain Module structured?***

**Getting to know you activities.** Everyone has got to feel comfortable and recognise that we are all unique and have things to offer. So I start by looking at everyone's strengths and giving them the checklist on multiple intelligence so they can identify where their strengths are.

**Strategies for reading and finding out information.** Using the workbook, we'll survey and skim and scan the book and see what is in it, activate their prior knowledge — ask them what they know about the brain already.

**How the brain works.** We look at how the brain is structured and how it operates in basics terms. We talk about integrating all the latest brain research such as drinking lots of water because it activates the brain for efficient electrical currents between the brain and the nervous system and maximises their learning.

**The left and right sides of the brain.** I incorporate some brain gym — cross-lateral movements — to integrate the left and right side of the brain. They do questionnaires and find out which is their most dominant side of the brain.

**Learning styles.** We discuss how different people process information

through auditory, visual and kinesthetic modes. They complete another checklist to determine which is their preferred learning style.

**How do you learn?** Once they have got a grasp on their learning style and the brain in general, we look more closely at information processing and use words like working memory, long-term memory, attention and information processing.

**Blockages to learning.** This knowledge then allows those students having difficulties to be able to identify the cause of their problems with learning.

**Strategies for success.** Once some students acknowledge the possible cause of their difficulties, one-on-one conferencing occurs in which we go through any assessment reports. Students are encouraged to work on using their strengths to compensate for any difficulties. They learn it is all right to experience difficulties. The emphasis is on using strategies to overcome any difficulties.

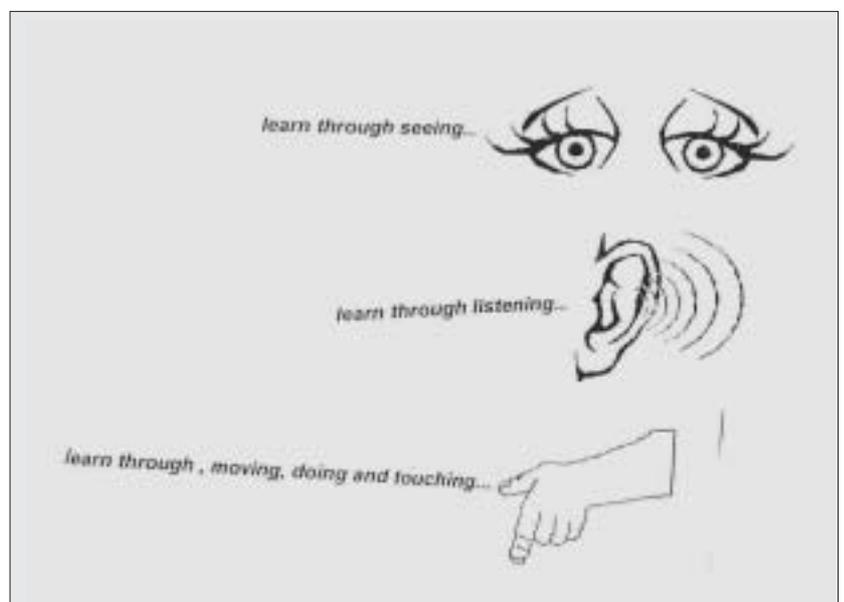
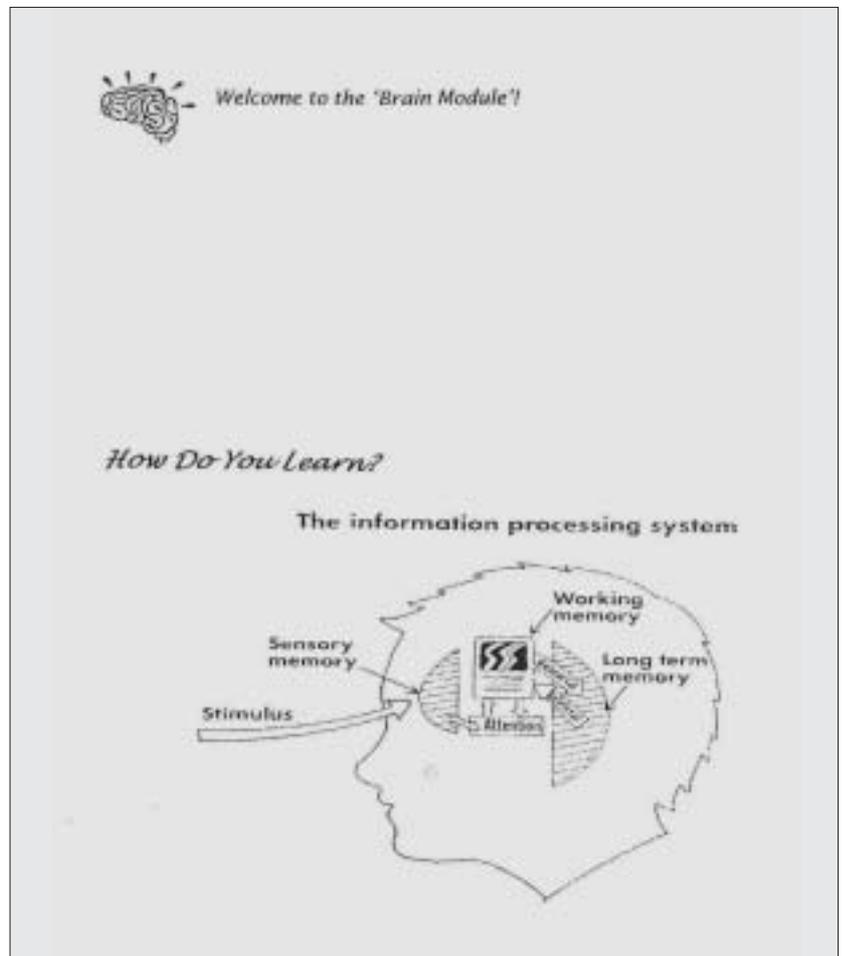
I have also collected quite a few stories about famous people with dyslexia, ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome so we examine their success stories — what they have accomplished even though they couldn't read or write at school.

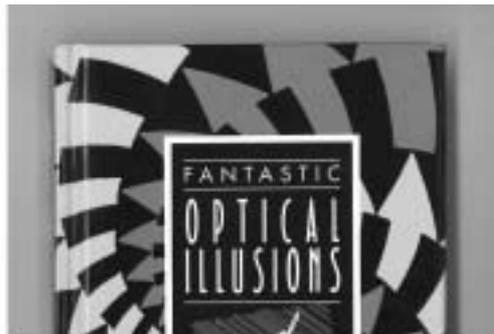
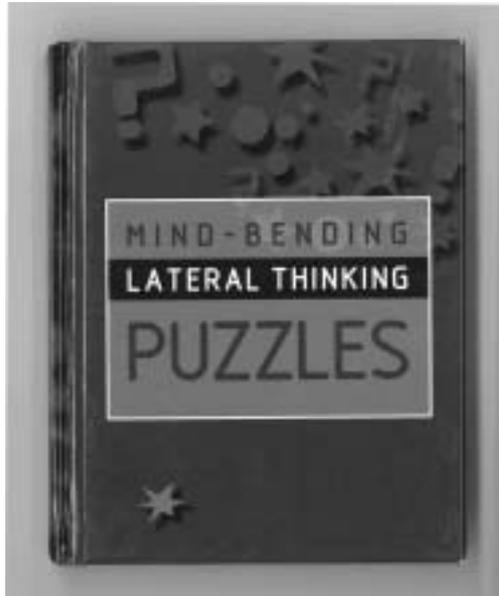
### ***How do they react to the process of finding out about their own learning styles?***

The Year 8s participate well because the lessons are interesting and it's something they can identify with. Because of the trust-building and relationship-building exercises at the beginning they know we will be sharing confidential or sensitive information but understand we are doing this for a reason. We are not drawing on labels or deficits, so by the time they get to identify difficulties they have done enough team-building to feel confident about discussing their difficulties.

I point out to the students that even though they have a strong intelligence or preferred learning style they've still got to train themselves in the other areas.

We use a lot of colourful charts and posters and games — matching games and interactive sorts of games and do a lot of group work — small groups where they feel comfortable, share and





talk. The boys take it on board, which is important, as there are three times more boys than girls in our school. Our classes are quite small too (about 18 students), so that makes for effective working.

***Once they have their strategies, what do they do with that information?***

The culminating activity, which we build up to throughout the unit, is the development of an individual learning profile. This profile goes on the database and is accessible by all teachers. I also compile a spreadsheet and graph for each Year 8 class that illustrates the proportion of each of those multiple intelligences, learning styles and right/left brain preferences.

I encourage the students to use their preferred learning across the curriculum to assist them with ways of studying at home and tackling other teachers' assignments. At St James, teachers are very good at differentiating the curriculum. Because it is an inclusive model, teachers really take on board their responsibilities as far as providing for the diverse needs within their classrooms.

The boys know their best ways of learning or presenting, so they are encouraged to use a variety of styles for assignments. I always give them choice: for example, choose from constructing a model of the brain, choosing a theme song, choreographing a dance routine incorporating the movements of brain gym, designing a cover for a magazine called *Brain News*, making a word search using words from my vocabulary list.

I incorporate strategies all the way through so I am integrating all sorts of literacy skills into this one module. There are spelling skills, writing paragraphs (the strategies), concept mapping to organise their paragraphs, strategies for reading comprehension using visual imagery, and doing mind-story webs.

Strategies for success are imbedded into the work I do. I teach them about assignment work, particularly how to break down their assignment using a task analysis. I ask what assignments they've got happening at the time so I teach them how to break them down into little steps, create a timeline working backwards from the due date, so that they assign a time to each step.

At the end of the module there is a tiered assessment ranging from creating a collage of themselves, writing a paragraph about themselves,

through to writing a letter to their pastoral coordinator introducing themselves and talking about their learning profile. I am catering for students of all levels and they can choose to stop where they want.

### ***How did you develop the concept of The Brain Module?***

I grabbed ideas from everywhere, but I put it together myself. I keep finding new tests, new checklists, new information about brain research, so as I find new resources I update the module but the basic concept remains the same.

Of course I have to change it according to the types of students in the class. When I did those graphs about the particular learning styles, some classes were very different. The 'chatty' class would have lots of interpersonal learners in it. One particular class was more active and you could tell that they were the body/kinesthetic learners. I also base my activities around their interests, too. So it is very flexible in its delivery, dependent on their needs.

I try to keep their attention in the lesson using an enthusiastic approach rather than a theoretical/academic approach. At the beginning of every lesson I have a brainteaser. I also have a brain box full of toys, games and exciting lateral-thinking books, which I incorporate into each lesson. Usually at the end of the lesson I finish off with something of their own choice, or I'll set up several stations with different lateral-thinking puzzles, games and challenging books.

A chance meeting with an optometrist has expanded the module to include a screening test. We discuss the brain and the eye with the optometrist, who then does a simple test to

determine whether students have Convergence Insufficiency when they read. If both eyes are not converging simultaneously on the page, this causes a lot of reading difficulties, because the writing appears blurred and words are swimming on the page. I pass these results on to parents.

### ***Do you have anything else you would like to say?***

When we go through the low-incidence disabilities — like Asperger's and Downes syndromes, and autism — we talk about it in a sensitive fashion referring to ways the brain works that they find interesting. They always want to know more about people, so it's a very good way of slipping in some personal development — tolerance of people's differences, understanding how somebody with autism feels, how they learn and what life is like for them.

I am a special education-trained teacher and I am an advocate for people with disabilities. I believe strongly in inclusion and participation so I encourage them to be more tolerant and understand people's differences. This takes away their fear and they no longer speak about people in a derogatory fashion. That's something I feel strongly about.



Diane started off as a high school-trained teacher in home economics, then went back to college to complete a Graduate Diploma in Special Education. She specialised in multiple and severe intellectual impairment and worked in a special school with people with disabilities. As St James's Head of Department of Teaching and Learning, Diane works in partnership with teachers to meet the individual needs of every student.

*Over the years I have been in different schools, different systems, here and overseas and I like curriculum. I keep abreast of all new things like vocational education so I have a good grip on curriculum and with this particular job I have learnt a lot in the area of literacy acquisition and learning difficulties. I have done a fair bit of up-skilling in this area and I think The Brain Module was a proactive way of helping students and sharing my expertise.*

Diane can be contacted on (07) 3839 4977 or email <mcd@stjamescollege.qld.edu.au>.

# Bulletin Board

## Black and White Looking After Their Own

**Rugby league is the tool being used to provide positive male role models for boys and girls in rural Northern NSW. This innovative program is forging mutually beneficial links between schools, sporting groups and the community.**

The Group 1 Lower Clarence Magpie Rugby League Football Club in Maclean Shire is developing a pilot program that provides coaching/life skills free of charge to 11 Lower Clarence schools.

Launched in November last year, the Magpie Pilot Project (Black and White Looking After their Young) is already providing positive results within the school community.

While searching for answers to her own family needs as a single mother, project coordinator Debrah Novak-Fisher discussed ideas with local Aboriginal elder Pop Laurie (who passed away last year). Rugby league presented an ideal opportunity for her son to get down and get dirty in a positive and healthy environment. 'I believe my children, but in particular my son, needed to be around men to learn from them something I could not teach him, that was, how to be a man.' And so the concept for the Magpie Pilot Project (MPP) was born.

At a thank-you morning tea for the team given by the students of St Joseph's Primary School in Maclean, the principal Paul Leeson was full of praise. 'It's unbelievable the impact these men and their project have had on the students in our school. The boys and girls have gained so much more confidence in their ability to have a go at new tasks.'

For the past six months the team has been coaching rugby league drill and ball skills, free of charge to 11 local schools with the emphasis on fun and fitness. Over that time 1500 students have been involved in the program on a weekly basis.

Funding was obtained for the two-year pilot project through the NSW Government's Planning NSW (North Coast Area Assistance Scheme: Building Better Communities) and the National Rugby League.

The four MPP team members are employed on part-time traineeships and are doing Level 1 through to Level 3 Sport and Recreation certificates through the Australian Training Company, while the coordinator's role is a voluntary position.



The team has developed 12 components that will be the focus of the pilot project in its second year: motivation, literacy, leadership, cultural awareness, life by choice, injury prevention, nutrition, substance abuse, conflict resolution, anger management, communication and career pathways.

Debrah Novak-Fisher explained that these 12 components are what make a great rugby league player, but they are also the same qualities that can make for a great human being who wants to lead a quality life. 'If we can transfer these positive rugby league skills to life skills then our wider community is going to be the definite winner,' she said.

Explaining and showing the boys the 12 components in a sporting context builds a foundation to show the boys how and where they fit into a social context.

On the footy field anger is often a reflex action to either physical or verbal abuse from the opponents. When the players are at training or doing the footy skills at school the opportunity arises to be able to make the comparison between the footy game and the bigger game we're all playing.

The players are encouraged to think about their actions and what effect these actions will have on



the outcome of the game. For example, with verbal anger: If you sledge off at the ref because you think he has made a wrong call, either you will be sent off or the team will be penalised depending on the severity of the abuse. Then transfer this behaviour to a social context. If you sledge off at the teachers, adults or police you can expect some form of punishment. The program tries to get across that it's okay to feel angry — it's how you show the anger that's the issue. This is followed through by teaching better ways of communicating to get a message across.

Similarly, the program works with physical abuse on the field. Abuse such as deliberate head-high tackling, punching, elbowing etc. will be penalised by the coach at training and also by the ref during the game. Once again the action impacts on the whole team. It is not just the perpetrator that is penalised. Transferred to a social context, this sort of behaviour in public would be deemed assault and you would be charged. Your action affects yourself, your family and your school.

Life by choice deals with how to take control of

your life and put it on track. The program looks at the differences between choosing to live a quality productive life, which has meaning, or choosing to go along with the flow. This involves courage and not opting for the easy way out. It's about learning not to blame others but to take responsibility for your own life.

The boys are not the only ones to benefit. Aboriginal liaison Tex Chapman says:

*Being able to explain to the kids that they have choices which can make all the difference on and off the field was rewarding when they actually realised they could do things differently.*

And Project Manager Pat O'Doherty welcomed the chance to be involved. 'This project is the perfect opportunity for me to give back something to the kids and rugby league,' he said.

The Magpie Pilot Project management team hopes that the success of this community partnership will go a long way in providing assistance in the healthy development of its young boys into fine young men.

*If we can transfer these positive rugby league skills to life skills then our wider community is going to be the definite winner.*

*Being able to explain to the kids that they have choice ... was rewarding when they actually realised they could do things differently.*



Debrah Novak-Fisher has lived in the Maclean Shire for 20 years and works as a press photographer for the local newspaper. She can be contacted on [dfisher@yambansw.com.au](mailto:dfisher@yambansw.com.au)

## Our Scrapbook of Strengths

A new tool to identify, explore and celebrate the strengths that bind families and communities together, *Our Scrapbook of Strengths* is ideal for building resilience, discovering buried strengths, and creating new possibilities for future change.

*Our Scrapbook of Strengths* is a unique collection of 42 colourful cards and a booklet. Each card features a set of full-colour paintings arranged with small artefacts to create a 'page' from a family scrapbook or photo album. The booklet offers a range of suggestions on how *Our Scrapbook of Strengths* may be used in different settings, including the classroom. This new resource is particularly useful under the PDHPE syllabus.

*Our Scrapbook of Strengths* is the fruit of collaboration between two leading Australian organisations that focus on family strengths: the Family Action Centre of the University of Newcastle, and Innovative Resources, the publishing and training arm of St Luke's Anglicare.

The idea emerged in 1999 when the Family Action Centre initiated the Australian Family Strengths Research project; the first wide-scale investigation into how Australian families identified their strengths. The result was the production of the 'Australian Family Strengths Template', a framework of eight themes of strengths (communication, togetherness, sharing activities, affection, support, acceptance, commitment and resilience) comprising 58 strengths statements.

Having successfully completed the project, the Family Action Centre was keen to see their findings translated into useful resources such as a family strengths kit. They approached Innovative Resources with their vision and this initiated another round of research to create a strengths-building tool.

*Our Scrapbook of Strengths* emerged from Innovative Resources's experience of matching key concepts with appropriate graphic images or visual metaphors. The number of items from the template was reduced, some of the language simplified and initial graphics suggested. All these changes were tested with focus groups conducted by both organisations.

The end result is an original, highly versatile 'conversational prompt' for exploring the strengths that bind families, groups, and communities together. As well as opening up possibilities to reflect on our experiences of strengths, it can be used to build resilience and optimism for future change.

The Family Action Centre also offers a half-day



workshop in the use of *Our Scrapbook of Strengths*. Our main trainer, Simone Silberberg, will tailor the training to your organisation's needs at a location of your choice for a cost to be negotiated on application. Through interactive exercises, the participants will explore the many applications of *Our Scrapbook of Strengths*, and gain background information on the Family Strengths Research project on which the development of *Our Scrapbook of Strengths* is based.

For more information on *Our Scrapbook of Strengths* training please contact:

**Program Secretary**

Camilla McQualter  
Ph: (02) 4921 8662  
Fax: (02) 4921 6934  
Email: Camilla.Mcqualter@newcastle.edu.au

**Program Manager**

Simone Silberberg  
Ph: (02) 4921 7280  
Email: Simone.Silberberg@newcastle.edu.au

**To order *Our Scrapbook of Strengths* please fax order form to:**

Megan McIlveen  
Fax: (02) 4921 8686  
Ph: (02) 4921 6401

Additional forms can be downloaded from our website:

<[www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac)>

## ■ Professional Development for Educators

*Available through the Boys in Schools Program,  
Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle*

At the Boys In Schools program we are passionate about boys' education. We really want to help teachers and parents get the best for our boys and from our boys.

Schools, communities and families all over Australia are grappling with the issues of how best to educate boys. Boys' low levels of literacy, poor academic achievement, aggression and harmful risk-taking are seen as serious problems in our community.

We would like to show you:

- How to fully engage boys in classroom learning.
- How to help boys use all of their intelligences.
- How to bring out the best behaviour in boys and develop their self-confidence.
- What a boy-friendly school might be like?

The Boys In Schools program offers a strengths-based approach to engaging boys, individually and in groups. Our approach recognises the importance of male identity and uses the potential resources of energy, humour and safe risk-taking that boys and older males are likely to bring to any situation. The program offers knowledge and skills development in educating boys for professionals and parents across Australia through workshops, seminars, training programs, postgraduate courses and publications.

### Specialised Boys in Schools Workshops

PHOTO: EDWARD CROSS



The Boys in Schools Program offers tailor-made professional development workshops for education staff at a local school, cluster or district basis. You can contact us with your particular professional development needs regarding educating boys, or look out for our one-day seminars in your state. We offer reasonable rates for whole-day and half-day professional development workshops and seminars.

*Boys in Schools workshop presenters, clockwise from top left: David Shores, Rollo Browne, Greg Griffith and Deborah Hartman*

## Rock and Water

### National Tour Details

#### NSW, NT And ACT Dates For November 2003 & March 2004

##### November 2003

Wodonga	5/6/7 November — 3-day workshop
Sydney	10/11/12 November — 3-day workshop
Canberra	19/20/21 November — 3-day workshop
Newcastle (Swansea)	24/25/26 November — 3-day workshop
Taree	27/28/29 November — 3-day workshop
Darwin	3/4/5 December — 3-day workshop

##### March 2004 (March dates still to be confirmed)

Newcastle	1/2/3 March
Newcastle Refresher	5 March
Sydney	8/9/10 March
Sydney Refresher	12 March
Murwillumbah	15/16/17 March
Inverell	22/23/24 March
Alice Springs	29/30/31 March

#### National Tour Contacts

##### NT/ACT/NSW — November

Boys In Schools Program  
Contact: Michelle Gifford  
Email:  
Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au  
Ph: (02) 4921 8739

##### South Australia — October

14/15/16 October  
Cabra College  
Contact: Kathy Hanna  
Ph: (08) 8272 4588  
Email:  
Kathy.hanna@cabra.adl.catholic.edu.au

##### Melbourne — October

7/8/9 October  
Parade College  
Contact: Sarah Morgante  
Email: smorgante@parade.vic.edu.au  
Ph: (03) 9468 3300

##### Queensland

If you are interested in becoming a host school in Queensland please contact Freerk Ykema by emailing f.ykema@quicknet.nl

##### Western Australia — October

21/22/23 October  
24/25 Advanced Training  
Wesley College  
Contact: Susan Laughton  
Ph: (08) 9368 8047  
Email: Slaughton@wesley.wa.edu.au

##### New Zealand — October

31 Oct & 1/2nd November  
Rock and Water NZ  
Contact: Chuck Marriott  
Ph: international 643 3587014  
Fax: 643 3587014  
Ph: national 03 358 7414  
Fax: 03 3587014  
Email: rockandwaternz@xtra.co.nz

The Rock and Water program is coordinated throughout Australasia by the Gadaku Institute and the Boys In Schools program and is presented by Freerk Ykema.

#### The program

The program offers teachers a new way to interact with boys and girls, through physical/social teaching. Physical exercises are constantly linked with mental and social skills. Simple self-defence, boundary and communication exercises leads to a strong notion of self-confidence.

The program offers a framework of exercises and thoughts about boys and manhood to assist boys to become aware of purpose and motivation in their life.

**Topics include:** intuition, body language, mental power, empathetic feeling, positive thinking and positive visualising. Discussion topics include bullying, sexual harassment, homophobia, goals in life, desires and following an inner compass.

**One-day introductory:** The Boys In Schools program can now offer one-day introductory workshops around Australia with our new qualified instructors who have been trained extensively by Freerk Ykema. The one-day workshop provides a survey of the entire course focusing on the first four lessons of the program. These include: standing strong physically and mentally; introduction to the Rock and Water attitude (in physical and verbal confrontation; Rock and Water in the schoolyard and in relationships (what kind of friend am I? — too rocky, too watery?). It will also include breathing exercises, exercises for boundary awareness and body language. Maximum of 30 participants per workshop. This is a great way to familiarise many staff in your school or organisation with the Rock and Water principles.

**Three-day workshop:** This workshop provides a survey of the entire course. Day one covers the contents of lessons 1 to 4: standing strong, the Rock and Water attitude in physical, mental and social context; and dealing with pressure from others. Day two extends the range of exercises and topics: breathing to extend physical power and to keep self-control; the body language of The Tunnel and of The Beach; feeling, setting and respecting our own and other people's boundaries. All lessons from 1–8 are practised. On day three you will complete lessons 9–13; these are best directed at boys only and are more suitable for students aged 14 or older. They address lack of direction, sexuality and personal development.

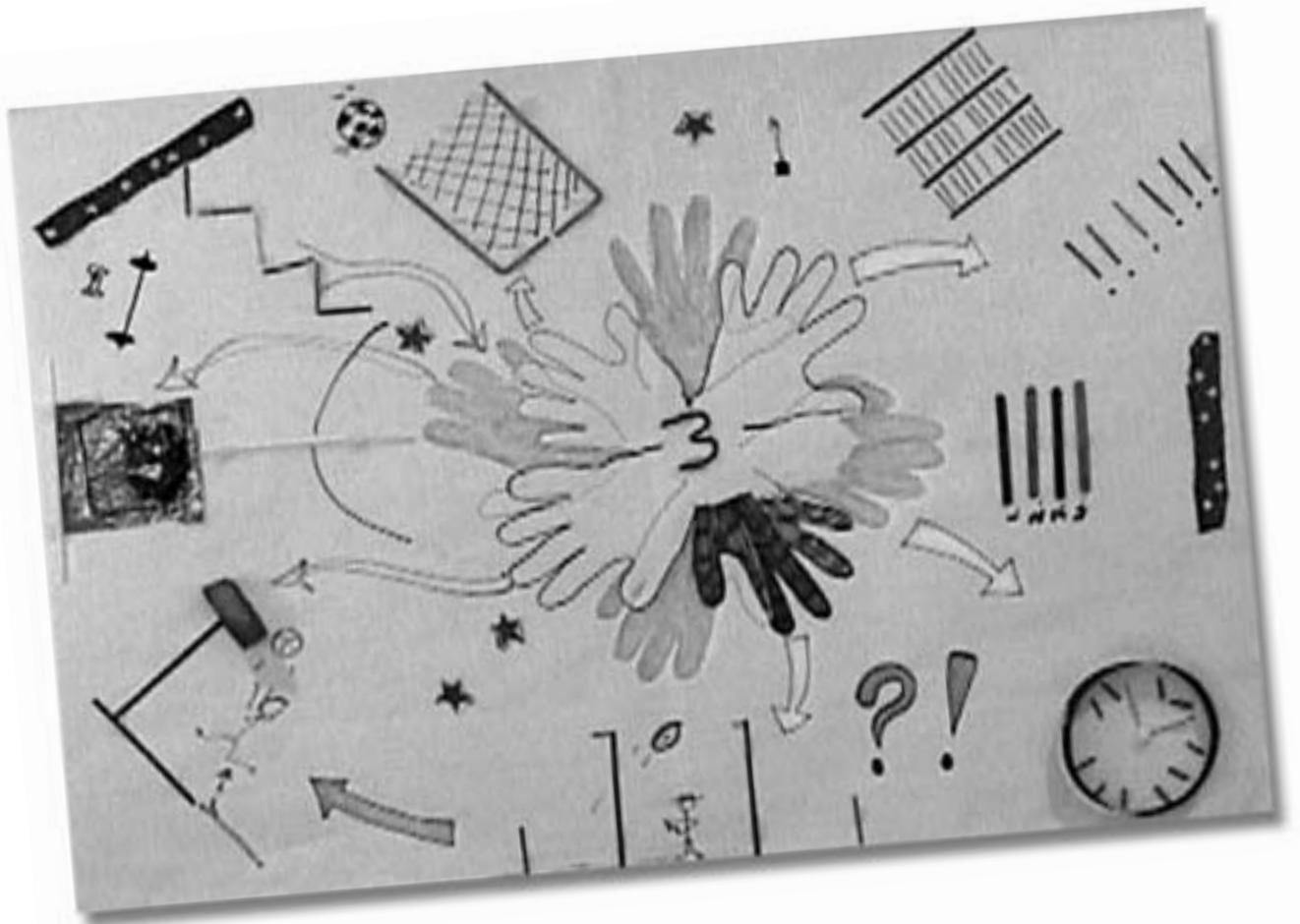
## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### BEBOP: Boys' Education, Boys' Outcomes Project

A systematic and comprehensive project for professional development and action research in educating boys.

BEBOP enables schools and/or groups or clusters of schools to systematically develop their approaches to boys' education, supported by research staff from the Boys In Schools program. It involves a series of professional development seminars in school-identified priority issues in educating boys, coupled with supported school-based action research tasks for school staff.

Over a 12- to 18-month period, BEBOP will help you achieve your outcomes for boys. In that time you will see many changes in your boys. They will participate more in the school's activities, improve their academic performance, exhibit more cooperative behaviour, expand their options and increase their involvement in extra-curricula activities.



## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### BEBOP: Boys' Education, Boys' Outcomes Project *continued*



Schools involved in BEBOP have:

- Developed effective school structures for educating boys and involving the community.
- Improved staff knowledge of the academic and social situation of boys.
- Developed strategies to build good relationships with boys, including effective classroom management techniques.
- Built knowledge of a range of successful literacy strategies, programs and resources for developing boys' literacy.
- Identified skills amongst staff to recruit fathers and father figures and involve them in the classroom.
- Implemented individual action plans to ensure that these outcomes are achieved.

As a teacher in a recent BEBOP says:

*I have learnt so much . . . I didn't stay back and whinge about the problems I had but [BEBOP] gave me a strategy and the confidence to go out there to search for solutions and solve them.*



## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### BEBOP Focus: Macquarie Fields

I only have to look out of my office window at the way boys are occupying themselves at recess and lunch to be reminded of some of the changes in our boys' behaviour. Outside there is lots of handball, some hand-held computer games and a group of boys engrossed in a game of chess. There are several Asians, two European students and a couple of 'Aussies' all enjoying the challenge. A few months ago, we purchased 20 chess sets as another leisure activity in the school playground and this has changed the way boys are expressing themselves and relating to each other. We still have a long way to go, but thanks to the hard work of our staff, we are on our way.

Macquarie Fields High School is a partially selective, partially comprehensive school in Sydney's south-west. This unique mix of students requires a wide variety of teaching skills to meet the range of student needs and abilities. The professional development team, under the leadership of the principal, developed a strategy to support staff by offering a high-quality planned professional development program over three years. For 2002–04 the theme is 'Adolescents Challenging Teachers'.

Having evaluated the curriculum we realised we needed to focus more on student engagement and the pedagogy supported within the school's curriculum structures. Of particular concern was the lack of engagement by male students.

We had been increasingly concerned over the low self-esteem and lack of commitment demonstrated by boys in all aspects of school life. This concern was reflected in ELLA results, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate statistics, as well as in the high number of suspensions and in the poor attendance patterns of boys at the school.

The Professional Development Leadership team identified the skilling of staff as a key strategy in enabling the school to best meet the needs of boys. Behaviour management programs, leadership initiatives, the creation of special literacy classes and the introduction of the TAFE-accredited peer-tutor reading program demonstrate this commitment to best practice in boys' education.

To further support staff in this initiative, we contacted the Boys In Schools program, which coordinates an action research project called BEBOP (Boys' Education Boys' Outcomes Project). In 2002 Deborah Hartman provided a number of workshops over six months involving staff in three initiatives:

- delivering a professional development workshop on classroom practice and behaviour management
- coordinating a boys' education team to carry out action research on specific issues related to boys' education at our school
- speaking at a special focus P&C meeting to gather further information about the 'image' of boys within the school and discuss the perceptions of parents about problems faced by teenage boys in this area

The aim of the program was to raise awareness about boys' education, reflect on beliefs about how boys learn best, develop classroom and whole school strategies to set a positive learning culture and develop opportunities for student participation and leadership. The school development day in semester 2 focused on boys' education, with the major theme to skill staff through improved classroom management and improved teaching practice to meet individual needs of students, especially those of boys.

### Focus on anticipated boys' education outcomes

During several workshops concerns were documented from staff and their understanding of the specific needs of boys, and the needs of gifted boys in terms of their potential and achievement levels, were documented. Another member of the Boys In Schools program, David Shores, conducted workshops for staff to further develop this understanding. The key questions included:

- How do we support boys and engage them in learning?
- Why are 90% of our case-management issues about boys?

**A BEBOP project in Sydney's south-west is tackling the 'too hard basket' of boys' education. Deputy Principal Virginia Elliott describes the process.**

*The Professional Development Leadership team identified the skilling of staff as a key strategy in enabling the school to best meet the needs of boys.*



*Many staff reported that academic interests were inhibited by poor language skills and the inability of male students to say what they really meant without the use of anger.*



### BEBOP Focus: Macquarie Fields *continued*

- What role-modelling needs to take place and how can we improve learning behaviour?

Many staff reported that academic interests were inhibited by poor language skills and the inability of male students to say what they really meant without the use of anger. Anecdotal data also indicated a reluctance of boys to read, and the 'culture' that boys just wanted to be average and not stand out.

Two staff members decided to look at ways to encourage boys to read more widely, data was collected through interviews and surveys and information was gathered about appropriate programs to support boys to develop stronger reading habits. There is a narrow perception of what it means to be male in the school population, and male talents other than sport and rock music are not easily celebrated within the school. There is some victimisation of those boys who don't fit this narrow perception, especially in the junior school. Building a culture where it is okay to be different has been an ongoing task for all staff. Leadership opportunities for boys have been encouraged, including responsibilities for raising the flag each day, recycling paper and building gardens to improve the physical environment of the school.

### The BEBOP project

The BEBOP project began in term 4, 2002, and will finish in term 3, 2003, with a report to be presented to the school community. Action research by seven staff members and two tertiary experts is occurring in four areas:

- Engagement: how to involve students in learning and change the learning culture?
- Behaviour: what is the peer support and role-modelling that needs to take place?
- Academic outcomes: what data will tell us that these have improved over time?
- Broadening options: what will we offer that specifically meets the needs of boys?

The project requires the coordination of a team of teachers to collect data, analyse patterns and trends and work with the school's professional development team to share knowledge and understanding of the need to improve boys'

educational goals and learning outcomes.

BEBOP focuses on learning outcomes for boys and student engagement, based on earlier discussions with staff, students and parents around the theme of Adolescents Challenging Teachers. The project has as its aim to create a learning culture where boys are:

- achieving to their potential
- tolerant, compassionate and confident
- willing to stand out from the crowd
- mature members of the school community acting as role models for other students
- willing to showcase and share their talents

If boys are to be fully engaged in learning we must identify what it is that makes our curriculum interesting and challenging for all students, but particularly boys. Data was collected to gain insight into the present perceptions about boys' learning needs. The strength of boys within the school were listed and included their sense of humour, honesty, sense of justice, caring concern and a sense of being protectors, general respect of teachers, acceptance of consequences for their actions, and their direct and forthright manner.

The strength of teachers both male and female within the school were listed and included their empathy, fairness, ability to listen, calmness, their professional preparedness, self restraint, flexibility and negotiation skills, and the way they provided options and choices for all students. The BEBOP project aims to make significant changes to the school culture and individual perceptions to enable the strengths of boys, the staff and the community to be more readily utilised to enhance boys' learning outcomes.

The commitment of staff to the beliefs and values held by the school community about academic achievement, high expectations, participation in leadership and decision-making, and the need for all students to reach their full potential is a firm foundation for this long-term strategy. I am extremely grateful to the staff in the boys' education team for their dedication to the goals of the project, their willingness to give time to the project and their belief that together we can make a difference.

## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### BEBOP Focus: Macquarie Fields *continued*

Case study:  
Danielle Leech, Careers Adviser

*I learnt that developing respectful relationships with boys was probably the most important thing in boy's education.*

I targeted three underachieving boys in my Year 10 work education class due to their attention seeking and disruptive behaviour patterns demonstrated during lessons. They commented the work was 'a waste of time' and 'boring', often not attempting set tasks and disrupting other students. My aim was to develop motivation strategies to overcome some of the problems, focusing on academic results and classroom engagement.

I employed the following strategies:

- discussing the boy's behaviour calmly and rationally
- identifying his career goals and pathways
- examining current class results and any inconsistencies with career choice
- cooperatively developing a plan of action
- adapting my teaching strategies to suit the learning styles of the boys

These strategies increased the on-task behaviour and led to fewer disruptions in class from the boys. They commented 'it made sense why we are doing this [schoolwork] now'.

I learnt that developing respectful relationships with boys was probably the most important thing in boy's education. Boys need to feel that they are valued as individuals, not just as part of the collective class. I will continue to develop the respect of the students in my class by spending the time outside of class to develop my knowledge of their goals.

Case study: Jocelyn Gooch, Support Teacher Behaviour

*. . . boys often react through physical means and that they need different and often specialised methods to deal with this anti-social behaviour.*

I identified three specific areas for change: the contrast between boys' and girls' behaviour in practical classes within the PDHPE faculty; the bullying tactics of some Year 9 boys and the vulnerability of a male student at risk.

In response to my findings I created a boys-only class in PDHPE, developed an intervention program for the 'bully group' and provided intervention for the at-risk student.

The results were quite interesting. The boys-only class is a year-long plan, however, it is already showing results, with the boys progressing well and enjoying the class. The use of a male role model was particularly successful. The students in the Anti-Bullying Program reported that they 'had learnt a lot more about the consequences of bullying and how they could react differently in those types of situations'. However, they also reported that they would be most likely to resort to violence because it was a 'man's way' of dealing with problems. The male at risk has since been moved from the school to a special-needs centre.

The most common themes arising from all three situations were that boys often react through physical means and need different and often specialised methods to deal with this anti-social behaviour. The boys were found to be honest and dealt with punishment well when they agreed they deserved it. Boys need to be motivated to learn and this may mean changing their learning environment and making sure that the curriculum is specialised so that it meets their specific needs.



## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### Our postgraduate programs will change the way you work with boys . . .

In its short history, the Graduate Certificate course has had a major impact, probably due to its practical and innovative nature, as its first students have found:

*We've changed our whole reporting system to parents as a result of an assignment I did on benchmarking.*

PRINCIPAL, LARGE PRIVATE BOYS' SCHOOL

*I've been able to implement programs for boys with nearly every assignment we've done. This is a very practical course.*

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, RURAL CO-ED HIGH SCHOOL

*The readings are very exciting. They really got me thinking about boys.*

FEMALE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

*Where did you find all this up-to-the-minute information? I haven't seen it anywhere else.*

MALE TEACHER, URBAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

*Each of the assignments completed could be used within the school environment in one way or another to improve boys' learning.*

MALE TEACHER,  
COEDUCATIONAL REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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The Boys In Schools program offers both a **Graduate Certificate** and a **Master's** program specialising in educating boys. These programs are the first in Australia for practising teachers who wish to develop their professional expertise in educating boys in various settings, primary, secondary, single-sex or coeducational schools.

The programs are available by distance mode through the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, and are delivered by the staff of the Boys In Schools program. This means you can upgrade your skills and specialise in educating boys, no matter where you teach.

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#### Course details

The program offers flexibility for busy teachers. At least three courses are offered each semester and students can begin during either semester one or two.

On completion of the Graduate Certificate, graduates can apply to continue to complete the Master's program. To complete the Graduate Certificate students must successfully complete a total of 40 credit points made up of one core course and three electives. Graduates can apply to continue on to the Master's program. For the Master's program, students need to complete 80 credit points.

The program is full-fee paying, with payment of the fees directly to the university. Costs are likely to be \$750 (inc. GST) per course. There is also a general service charge. Course fees may be a legitimate tax deduction.

#### For more information

Visit [www.newcastle.edu.au/courseinfo/handbook/htm](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/courseinfo/handbook/htm)

Or contact Michelle Gifford on

Ph: (02) 4921 8739

Email: [Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Michelle.Gifford@newcastle.edu.au)

## ■ Professional Development for Educators

### But don't take our word for it . . . read about boys' learning in action

Amanda Hutchins, Mark Sampson and Stephen Smith are all studying the course 'Boys and Classroom Practice'. Steve Gaul (Boys In Schools Assistant Manager) summarises some of their thoughts on three of the issues raised within the course.

#### After completing a Multiple Intelligence preference checklist on their students:

*These results will have a dramatic effect on the way I teach this group. I will need to direct my teaching and design my learning activities around their areas of strength and weakness and not my own areas of strength and weakness. AH*

*The results further support the findings of the House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training report that boys tend to prefer variety, humour, a hands-on approach to learning, and a positive relationship with their teacher. MS*

*These results indicate clear differences between the learning preferences of boys and girls. Whilst the results for this class do not perfectly match the results for larger/other groups, they do follow the general trends observed elsewhere. The Standing Committee on Education and Training found that about two-thirds of boys are kinesthetic learners and one-third are visual learners. Clearly these findings parallels with the results of the survey. SS*

#### On teacher/student relationships:

*The results from my class survey justify Ken Rowe's beliefs that the quality of the teacher and the relationship they have with their students is the key. In effect, students learn the teacher, not the subject. MS*

*The NZ Education Review Office identifies high standards of behaviour management and discipline, and a supportive environment with positive role models as conditions for achievement. These views are supported by Teele, who recognises the importance of teachers as role models and the development of positive relationships between teachers and students. The Standing Committee on Education and Training also identified the development of positive relationships as a key factor in educating boys . . . This implies that the teacher/student relationship can be as important as the pedagogical delivery mode. SS*

#### On assessment:

*Sternberg claims that everyone has a preferred style of learning and that many students are placed at a marked disadvantage because the way a course is taught and assessed is in conflict with the style that a student learns. To overcome this, teachers must constantly vary teaching and assessment methods to reach each student. MS*

*To meet the needs of this group of boys, I will need to design assessments where they are given a choice as to how they can present the assessment to allow them to use their areas of strength to their advantage . . . If they can meet the learning outcomes of the assessment, but each student produces a product that draws on their areas of strength, then the students are more likely to see purpose to the assessment and to learn something as they are doing it. AH*

(NB: References not included)

In the courses offered by our postgraduate programs, we cover material aimed at making the classroom, and wider school environment, a better place for boys to learn and grow. As you can be seen from these extracts, issues that are relevant and important in the education of boys are addressed. The courses are about helping teachers help boys reach their potential and celebrate in their successes.

# Boys in Schools Resources / ORDER FORM

BOYS IN SCHOOLS TITLES	PUB NO.	PRICE (INC. GST)	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Boys in Schools Bulletin (school set subscription) — 3 copies of each issue	002S	\$110.00		
The Boys in School Bulletin (single subscription) — 1 copy of each issue	970	\$45.00		
The Boys in School Bulletin 2002 back issues — 1 copy of each issue (=3)	004S	\$40.00		
The Boys in School Bulletin 2001 back issues — 1 copy of each issue (=3)	004S	\$33.00		
Being a Man Photopak — photographs to help provoke boys' thoughts and words	979	\$132.00		
Boys in Schools — addressing real issues: behaviour, values and relationships	961	\$28.00		
Leadership in Boys' Education — results from a national forum held in 1999 including chapters from Steve Biddulph, Don Edgar and Richard Fletcher, 16 case studies	992	\$33.00		
I Can Hardly Wait Till Monday — women teachers talk about what works for them	001	\$33.00		
Boyz Rulez posters	981	\$33.00		
FatherCare posters	983	\$20.00		
Male Health posters	991	\$33.00		
Boys to Men posters	004	\$33.00		
113 Ways to Be Involved As a Father poster	006	\$11.00		
Rock and Water Approach (2nd edition)	002	\$55.00		
The Rock and Water Perspective: Theory Book	007	\$35.00		
Rock and Water Action Reaction video (English subtitles, high school age only)	008	\$55.00		
Rock and Water Basic Exercises video	009	\$55.00		
Man's World: A Game for Young Men (suitable for high school age only)	974UK	\$121.00		
NEW: 2003 Boys to Fine Men and Community Partnership Conference Manual	021	\$88.00		
NEW: Boys to Fine Men Conference Song — 2 song tracks included	015	\$17.50		
<b>OTHER RESOURCES</b>				
NEW: Sometime Magic — 32 colourful laminated cards	010	\$46.75		
NEW: Strength Cards for Kids — strengths-based resources for primary school-aged children	011	\$49.50		
NEW: Our Scrapbook Of Strengths — 42 colourful cards to identify, explore and celebrate the strengths that bind families and communities together	101	\$49.50		
NEW: Games for Growing — Wilson McCaskill — game for behavioural enhancement and modification through the use of physically interactive games, 163 A4 pages	013	\$54.95		
PLEASE NOTE: Unfortunately we cannot send resources on approval		Subtotal		\$
FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Boys In Schools Ph 02 4921 8739 Fax 02 4921 8686		Postage & handling (add 15% to max. \$20)		\$
Please add 15% for postage and handling (up to \$20.00 maximum)		TOTAL		\$

Make cheques payable to: The Boys in Schools Program (ABN 15 736 576 735)

Contact name: \_\_\_\_\_ Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please invoice our organisation (Australia only)  Enclosed is my cheque for AUD\$

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